

THE MANITOBA

# Teacher

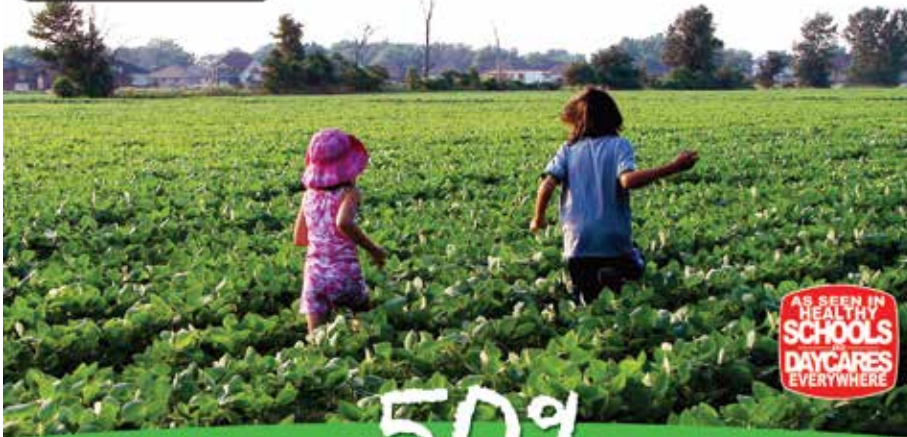
JUNE 2015 VOLUME 93 NUMBER 7 NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY



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is working to complete its collection of The Manitoba Teacher magazine!



Questions about these or any other potential archival donations? Contact Mireille Theriault at 204-837-4666 / [mtheriault@mbteach.org](mailto:mtheriault@mbteach.org)

*Issues from every decade are welcome but those from the 1930's, 40's and 50's are of particular interest.*



The Manitoba Teachers' Society

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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

PAUL OLSON

This is the time we make a transition in this space. For four years Paul Olson has kept members abreast of issues and actions of the provincial executive of the society. In the last issue, Paul bid farewell to members as his term as president came to a close.

As of the end of the MTS Annual General Meeting, we welcome new president, Norm Gould. Beginning with the September issue, Norm will take on the role here of informing members about decisions of the provincial executive and direction of the Society.

Norm has a long history with the Society, which you can see in the story below.



# Norm Gould president

Norm Gould has been acclaimed as the next president of The Manitoba Teachers' Society.

Gould has been the Society's vice-president for the past four years. Before that he was on the MTS provincial executive and was president of the St. James-Assiniboia Teachers' Association. He has been a teacher for 20 years.

He said one of the most important issues in the years ahead is for MTS to be a unified voice for teachers.

"We are at a critical juncture as a society in the discussion of social services; programs and benefits, including education that have built the very social fabric that define us as Canadians and Manitobans," he said. "We must engage and mobilize our membership."

He pledged that he will listen to all members, following up on the past few years when he visited numerous schools to discuss a variety of issues with teachers.

Gould has taught at all three levels and is vice chair of the Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund and is a vice-president of the Canadian Teachers' Federation.

James Bedford (Louis Riel Teachers' Association) was elected vice-president of MTS at the Society's AGM.

Delegates also elected nine teachers as members at large on the provincial executive.

### The full executive for the coming year is:

President: Norm Gould (St. James-Assiniboia)

Vice-President: James Bedford (Louis Riel)

### Members at large:

Ray Desautels (St. James-Assiniboia)

Frank Reeves (River East Transcona)

Richard Alarie (AEFM)

Mary Chalmers (Border Land)

Jeff Cieszecki (Seven Oaks)

Ashleigh Deeley (Pembina Trails)

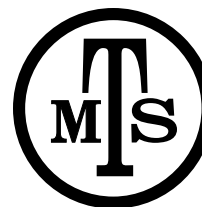
Darren Hardy (Brandon)

Kristin Insull (Winnipeg)

Bob Kriski (Portage la Prairie)

Jonathan Waite (Seine River)

Bea Walker (Flin Flon)



# The Manitoba Teachers' Society

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## INSIDE MTS

**KEN PEARCE**, GENERAL SECRETARY

**M**y last opportunity to produce this column before retiring!

Well, my dear colleagues, I am very sad indeed to be leaving an organization that has been a source of inspiration, frustration, delight and despair over the many years of my involvement with it!

It was a profound privilege to be involved as president in 1996/1997, despite the turmoil we were experiencing at that time. Even more so, it has been a most challenging and exciting experience for me serving as your General Secretary for the past six years. It has been a rewarding time for me, working with national and provincial colleagues and partners. In

travelling throughout this wonderful province I have had the distinct pleasure of meeting with so very many teachers in villages, towns and cities. No matter where I have met people I have never failed to be impressed with the energy and humour that is evident in schools and communities everywhere!

Turning now to working in the office in our award-winning building; what a real pleasure it has been. I can honestly say that in my very long and extensive working life, I have never worked for an employer that has been so caring and so very generous to its staff and have lacked for no support in terms of the provision of a clean, safe and supportive workplace.

Thank you for providing for your staff the most enviable working conditions it is possible to find.

Your staff will now be working with a new General Secretary, Bobbi Taillefer, and to her I offer sincere congratulations and pass on to her the huge responsibility to lead staff into the last four years of this first century of The Manitoba Teachers' Society!

I wish you all well and trust that the upcoming arrangements to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Society will be a suitable testament to those in our past who worked tirelessly to create conditions for a truly professional, caring organization.

# Take a book, **leave a book**

**Y**ou may have already noticed and wondered about the red box with a white roof hanging on the fence of the Society's parking lot. Built with an old school house in mind, the Society's new Little Free Library is now open and we'd love for you to visit and take out a book or two the next time you stop by.

The Little Free Library works on a "Take a book, leave a book" concept. It not only promotes literacy but also connects us to our neighbourhood as well as the large community of teachers that visit our building every year.

"When approached by Matea, a member of our communications and publications staff, to build a Little Free Library at the Society, I jumped at the chance," says Society's General Secretary Ken Pearce.

The MTS Library is registered with [littlefreelibrary.org](http://littlefreelibrary.org) – a national organization that started the Little Free Library movement in 2009. By January 2015, the total number of registered Little Free Libraries in the world was conservatively estimated to be nearly 25,000, with 18 or so in Manitoba, including at a number of schools. You

can use the [littlefreelibrary.org](http://littlefreelibrary.org) site to find other Little Free Libraries in Manitoba and around North America, and find information on how to start up your own little library at school or at home.

**"Next time you come by MTS, pick up or drop off a book and help spread the word that print books are still in vogue!"**

*- Ken Pearce, MTS General Secretary*

Staff at the Society has been busy collecting books from home to fill up the library. The Library offers anything from children's picture books to science fiction and historical novels – the books change every day so every time you visit you'll find something new to read. There are no rules, no late fees and everyone can take part.

If you have some books lying around the house consider dropping them off at our Library next time you come by MTS and share your loved literature with fellow readers. Who knows, that little red box could be holding your new favorite book.



# Annual fee sees slight increase



**M**TS members will see a \$17 a year increase in fees next year as delegates to the MTS Annual General Meeting approved the proposed budget.

The hike represents a 1.78 per cent increase over last year, bringing the annual fee to \$956 from \$939.

In the past six years the fee has increased only \$51. Adjusted for inflation, it is actually lower than it was in 1998.

As they have in the past couple of years, AGM delegates approved putting money from the Society's Operations Stabilization Fund into the budget to ease the fee increase. Without the \$400,000 transfer the fee would have been \$985.

## Technology study approved

MTS will establish a committee to examine the impact of technology on teacher workloads.

Delegates to the AGM voted in favour of forming the committee, which will seek representation from other groups, such as the Manitoba School Boards Association and Manitoba Association of School Superintendents.

The resolution, introduced by the Winnipeg Teachers' Association, calls for a "comprehensive study on the availability and effective use of computer technology."

"The study shall include, but not be limited to, the impact of technology usage on teachers' workload, teacher burnout, lesson preparation

and communications with parents."

In its support of the idea, the WTA said that there have been positive results from the introduction of technology and it has become a "vital and indispensable educational tool."

"However, when certain technologies are introduced, they increase teachers' workload. Often the technology does not function in the way it is intended and sometimes it is not accessible or available when needed."

A report is to be presented to next year's Annual General Meeting.

## Health education curricula to be examined

Delegates approved a call to have MTS review existing health education curricula related to sexual consent.

The resolution, introduced by the Seven Oaks Teachers' Association, says misconceptions about what constitutes sexual consent are widespread.

"To promote safety and health, students need clear, direct information reflecting Canadian legal standards regarding sexual consent, mainly that meaningful consent exists only when it is affirmative, uncoerced, conscious, informed and ongoing."

The association said that the current curricula discuss boundary rights and health relationships, but stops short of clearly defining consent.

Any recommendations from the review will be presented at next year's AGM.

## Wellness program to start

AGM delegates got a sneak peek at a province-wide wellness program being developed by the MTS Disability Benefits Plan.

The program, called Balance, will be aimed at helping improve the physical and emotional health of all MTS members, through seminars, workshops and newsletters.

Details of the program will be announced when it begins in September.

## MTS urged to broaden activism

The Manitoba Teachers' Society must extend its activism beyond the classroom to social issues that have an indirect, but profound, impact on student achievement, says the outgoing Society president.

Paul Olson told delegates to the AGM that MTS has both a professional and social responsibility to society as a whole as well as teachers and students.

While the Society has made a positive difference in the lives of students and teachers through its work on such issues as curriculum and class size, other concerns such as poverty, mental health care and safe housing also demand attention.

Addressing, and trying to eliminate those social ills, has proven to improve student learning elsewhere in the world.

"Other countries do this," Olson said. "Finland is but one example of a country that has achieved consistent, top-tier educational

outcomes on international measures. But political and educational leaders in Finland will be the first to tell you that those successes rest upon a social contract that has deep and broad supports for families and community health.”

It is not beyond the scope of MTS to

embrace those issues along with matters such as curriculum, instruction and professional development, he said.

“Matters such as poverty, housing, food and water security, system racism, union solidarity and labour rights for all are entirely appropriate – and I’d argue vital – areas of concern and

engagement for the teacher as citizen and for the teachers’ society as the collective voice and body of teachers.”

So far, MTS policies are almost exclusively focused on measures that directly impact teachers, students, classrooms and schools. More AGM coverage at [mbteach.org](http://mbteach.org)

## Retired teacher numbers growing

Within 20 years the number of retired teachers will well outnumber active teachers, raising questions about rate increases or changes to benefits, delegates to the MTS Annual General Meeting were told.

Ross Dunlop, chair of the Teachers’ Retirement Allowances Fund (TRAF), said the number of retirees continue to climb closer to the number of active teachers.

Currently the ratio is 1.1 active teachers to one retired teacher. By 2032 it is estimated that ratio will be .77 active teachers to one retired teacher.

The trend has been ongoing for a number of years as retirees live longer and the number of

active teachers remains virtually unchanged.

In 1979, a newly-retired teacher of 58 was expected to live to age 82. In 2009, that teacher was expected to live to 87.

For the TRAF plan to be sustainable over the long term, increasing costs due to longevity must be examined, he said.

“If there is no appetite for appropriately considered contribution rate increases, benefit adjustments may be required to keep the TRAF plan sustainable.”

The TRAF board is not recommending any new rate increases, but once again emphasized that there have to be discussions about the long-term projections.

Brenda Venuto, acting Chief Executive Officer of TRAF, said there are currently 13,852 retired members or 37.8 per cent of the total. There are 15,706 active members or 42.9 per cent of the total. The remainder are known as deferred members, such as teachers who left teaching or the province and left contributions in the fund.

More and more retirees are collecting pensions for more years than their careers. For example, there are now 26 retirees over 100 years of age, the oldest being 108. And there are 2,500 teachers eligible right now for a pension and there will be almost 5,000 in the next five years.

## YHA evening kicks off AGM

Some of Manitoba’s greatest young activists were honoured for their kindness, altruism and generosity at the 18th annual MTS Young Humanitarian Awards on May 20th. A fitting opening to the MTS Annual General Meeting, the awards were held at the Fairmont Winnipeg and hosted 31 public school students from four school divisions, as well as their teachers, family and friends. This year’s YHA winners include: Brooklyn Maguathi (Paddock), a Grade 3 student from Riverview School in Brandon; Jenna Sigurdson, Grade 8 student at École George McDowell School; and Kirsten Trimble, a Grade 11 student from Portage Collegiate. The group award went to the 28 members of Global Kidizens from École J.B. Mitchell School.

YHA was hosted by radio personality Ace Burpee and featured performances from singers Dane Bjornson and Paige Prescott, the vocalist group Prodigy, and the Ensemble folklorique de la Rivière-Rouge dance troupe.





BY DONNA MAXWELL

If it takes a village to raise a child, what does it take to raise a village? The answer, at least for dozens of small villages in Ghana and Uganda, is Nkabom.

Nkabom is an African word that means ‘to come together’ and it’s appropriately the name of a Canadian Teachers’ Federation program that has been doing that, and then some, in 60-plus villages in Ghana first and now Uganda.

Alex Davidson, international program officer with CTF, said Nkabom has been around for a number of years and has undergone several changes. It originally concentrated on professional development of teachers but evolved to include a community mobilization and advocacy component. The most recent addition to its efforts is to educate the people about gender equality.

“The main outcomes for us are teachers that feel much more supported, much more efficacious in their work,” Davidson said. “(We see) More students going to school, more students completing school and more girls especially doing both those things. And basically achievement going up.”

CTF and the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) work together on

Nkabom and concentrate on villages with the greatest needs.

The communities may have had a school building, but it was in poor condition, having deteriorated over the years or perhaps been poorly constructed. Sometimes there were desks in the schools, but they were broken and heaped in a corner, unused for years.

Children would sit wherever they could during lessons, under trees for shade or a lean-to that would protect them from wind and rain – certainly not ideal learning conditions.

The schools often had no books and teachers would try to teach with a blackboard as their only resource.

“This is how reading is taking place in that school,” Davidson said. “Well, you can’t really teach reading without books, (and) there’s no books. The teacher’s written something on the blackboard...there’s no resources.”

And while education is a key concern for Nkabom, the health of the village overall is also taken into consideration. Burris Devanney, a Canadian teacher from Nova Scotia who has spent the last 50 years working and volunteering in Africa, introduced the community mobilization aspect to Nkabom in 2008.

Devanney said he’d done similar work in The Gambia, where he’d spent 13 years

DOING IT  
THEMSELVES  
GHANA  
WITH A LITTLE HELP  
FROM TEACHERS

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working with his own NGO, the Nova Scotia Gambia Association. He'd originally done some community mobilization work in his home province before extending it to The Gambia and it was there, in partnership with Dalhousie University, that they developed a profile book that each community would work on.

Devanney introduced the profile book to Nkabom.

Before Devanney and members of GNAT come to a village, they arrange for a meeting with the entire village, and when their vehicle pulls into the community, people begin to emerge from all corners to participate.

Once the meeting begins, with Devanney and GNAT members being aided by teachers or principals who can translate, they tell the people they're not to give them anything, but to ask them to complete what at first seems an unrealistic task.

They ask them to write a book. In English. "They don't even believe they can do it," Devanney laughed.

"They'd say 'no way', and they'd laugh."

But then, using a tactic that has worked as a motivational tool for everyone from athletes to young children learning a new task, he appeals to their sense of pride and shows them a book written by people in a Gambian village, a village, he points out, that is smaller than their own.

"And they'd say if the Gambians can do it the Ghanaians can do it. And it would start from there, so they'd start believing they can do it," Devanney said.

Each book is about 12 pages and the assignment is to complete the book in two or three days.

The book would be handwritten and include all the strengths and weaknesses of the village. It would also include its history as well as an action plan of how the villagers themselves were going to improve their community. After identifying what they could do themselves, they would identify larger projects they would need help with.

"They come up with an action plan, what they would do for themselves. They'd even work out deadlines," Devanney said.

Davidson said that political promises made to communities have often been empty, but villagers see a neighbouring village that did in fact receive the school building or the bridge that they were promised. So, understandably, they wait for their turn, but of course it never comes. Nkabom can impress upon the villagers that they have in the past been responsible for their own success and they can again take matters into their own hands.

Devanney said they are very neglected

villages, but through the process of writing the book, the people come to the realization that there are things they can do to help themselves.

"They start laughing but they start catching on that actually this was their school. Believe me they wouldn't think that at first because, they used to explain to us that once the government had taken over education almost fully, then they depended on government to do almost everything. And they thought if government doesn't do it, well, we're not gonna do it," Devanney said.

"It was a matter of getting them to change their whole perspective on this."

At the end of the three-day period, GNAT and CTF members would go over the book with the villagers and about 10 copies would be printed and their action plan would begin.

GNAT and CTF would return weeks later to see how they were progressing and if things were good, they would move on to a partner forum, where they would connect with other communities that were mobilized and meet with government agencies, NGOs and even local businesses that might be able to assist them with the list of needs that are too large for the villagers to complete on their own. Those projects might include a better road, or a bore hole for a water source.

But if the village hasn't done anything for themselves, this forum doesn't occur.

Devanney said a strict rule is they don't ask anybody for anything, unless they've done something for themselves.

"Because if you go to government, or you go to NGOs and you want them to help you with whatever it is, if you've done nothing for yourself they might not be so inclined to help," he said.

Debora Barry, a Manitoba teacher who travelled to Africa with CTF's Project Overseas in 2010, was struck by the lack of basic supplies teachers had at the schools where she did professional development.

She was working with junior high science teachers, and had to adapt to teaching with nothing.

"It's unbelievable. I said I would never complain again about lack of anything. When you see what they have to work with, which is really very little," Barry said. "When I was inservicing teachers I had to constantly think about how to adapt...they don't have science equipment."

The experience stuck with her and she contacted Davidson to find out what more she could do.

Davidson connected her with the people of Bokorvikofe, who were part of Nkabom.

They were working towards bettering their community and Barry liked the idea of shared responsibility.

"(Davidson) got me involved in the Nkabom project and I liked (its) almost connection with the Habitat for Humanity kind of an idea, where you're empowering," Barry said.

Barry, along with her Hastings School Grades 3 and 4 class, set about fundraising to build a school. She took the Nkabom approach at home too, and the school in the Louis Riel School Division, and local community, pitched in to better themselves as well as the people in Bokorvikofe.

Barry said they began recycling Kool-Aid jammer pouches – before they were even recyclable – into lunch and tote bags and selling them to raise money.

"We were taking these actually out of the garbage because at the time they weren't recyclable, so we were recycling and helping our community in that way, but the money we raised went towards the school."

At the end of the year, they'd raised \$6,500 – not enough for the school, but in partnership with the Ottawa South Rotary Club, they had \$10,000 and the school was a go.

Villagers did the construction.

Barry returned to Bokorvikofe in July 2011 for the groundbreaking ceremony and she said the difference in the village was obvious.

"They were very excited. Everybody was there. When we drove up they had drummers ready, they had dancers ready, we were greeted with dancing and drumming and singing and all the villagers were sitting around waiting for us."

The Nkabom project has had that effect in about 60 villages in Ghana and has now moved on to Uganda.

"Once you've had a bit of success with a few villages, then the next village you go to at some point just hold up the book from the village down the road and say 'look what these people did, down there.' And the others say 'yeah, we can do that. If they can do it we can do it. We can do it better.'" Devanney laughed.



# WORRYING ABOUT WORRY



BY JENNIFER MCFEE

**D**on't worry, be happy. The song is simple, the reality in schools, not so much. Worry and anxiety can become debilitating issues — and not just for adults, since children feel the effects as well.

Just ask school psychologist Keith Moen, who has been examining the impact of anxiety on classrooms and kids.

“Worry is a normal part of being human. We’re hard-wired for worry. It’s something we all experience. It’s a way to

understand that something is not right in the world, such as we perceive a threat. Worry becomes a problem depending on its level of frequency, duration and intensity,” says Moen, who works throughout the Louis Riel School Division.

“Worry begins to move into the realm of anxiety when it starts to take over our ability to act. It’s a vicious cycle, and there are physiological responses. Behavioural and cognitive learning can start to sink like a pit. Not only are you not taking action, anxiety can produce behaviors that make things worse. It can be self-perpetuating.”

Think of it like an onion, Moen suggests. The outer layers represent externalized behaviours, such as ripping up homework or kicking over a chair. Inside the onion, the central kernel represents internalized worry or anxiousness.

“If we can deal with the internal parts of the students, we’ll see a reduction of the externalized behaviours, the frustrating things. We’re not trying to cure the behaviour. We’re trying to go deeper to create a structure for people to grow and be well from the inside out,” Moen says. “Then we get them to a behavioural place to learn better. Physically, the brain will learn better when it’s not activated.”

Spikes of anxiety cause the amygdala to surge chemicals through the body and brain, resulting in a “fight, flight or freeze” reaction, he adds.

**\* Scan the QR code with your phone to access an emotional colour wheel PDF.**

“The problem is that you may learn to cope and reduce your own anxiousness, but it could be by running out the door. We can get some really bad habits quite quickly because it’s such a powerful force,” Moen says.

“At the same time, when the amygdala kicks in, the prefrontal cortex — the part of the brain that thinks about problem solving and long-term consequences to action — goes dim. That’s what we want to tap into. We can teach students to use mindfulness strategies such as conscious breathing to help them calm the amygdala, tune up the cortex, and better manage and cope with that frustrating demand.”

For some students, this frustration could stem from their studies. For others, it’s stressful to simply be in a social situation.

“All students have some lagging thinking skills that contribute to their stress. Some students are anxious just being around other kids, especially students who are on the autism spectrum,” Moen says.

“Other students find school stressful because their motor runs faster than the other students. School demands a lot of sitting and trying to focus. That’s why we see some students who have a harder time functioning.”

To help manage these matters, Moen recommends a three-tiered approach that focuses on the big picture, the small group and the individual.

For Tier 1, the focus is on the classroom or the whole school. From this perspective, teachers can help reduce worry and stress by minimizing visual stimulation and playing calm music during quiet times. They can also help students to prepare by providing schedules, timers and advance notice for transitions. As well, teachers can encourage kids to get 20 minutes of exercise each day.

“Exercise has a remarkable positive effect on decreasing cortisol, the stress chemical. At the same time, it increases the good mood chemicals and the regulation chemicals in the brain, such as serotonin and dopamine,” Moen explains.

“It also increases the learning chemicals that produce brain connections between the neurons. They benefits for tension, learning, engagement and emotional regulation.”

Next, Tier 2 focuses on small groups, which can allow students to practise social skills. In this realm, teachers can use yoga poses and breathing activities to create a calm classroom environment. Students can also learn about what happens in the brain with worry and anxiety, as well as how to change their thought process if they get locked into a spiral of worry.

For Tier 3, the focus is on the individual student. To reduce worry and stress on a

**“Worry is a normal part of being human. We’re hard-wired for worry. It’s something we all experience. It’s a way to understand that something is not right in the world, such as we perceive a threat. Worry becomes a problem depending on its level of frequency, duration and intensity.”**

*– Keith Moen, School Psychologist,  
Louis Riel School Division*

personal level, each child should feel a sense of attachment to an adult in the school.

“There are times in our lives when a certain flavour of worry is normal and developmentally appropriate. Attachment is a critical part to the whole phenomena of school. Ideally, all these children come from parents and homes that they’re healthily attached to, and now they’re in a foreign environment,” Moen says.

“Time and time again, you hear stories of children getting tummy aches after eating lunch. We don’t properly digest our food if we’re not around people that we’re attached to. It’s biological. When you go into fight, flight or freeze, a lot of your functions turn off, including your digestion. So you can think of attachment as a reduction of the brain-based worrier.”

Like Moen, student services team member Sandra Saint-Cyr offers some practical tips for teachers to understand their students’ anxiety.

“For students dealing with anxiety, they can develop some very counter-productive ways to hide it by the time they get to Grade 4. If it’s a math anxiety, they’ll find ways to avoid being put on the spot with math. Their behaviour will get in the way of success,” says Saint-Cyr, who works at Samuel Burland School.

“Sometimes as adults, we want to respond to the behaviour, but we forget that there’s something underneath that is causing that behaviour to surface. We know a student probably doesn’t want to have difficult behaviour issues. But in a way, it’s better to be bad than to be stupid. If they perceive

that they can’t do something, they’d rather cover it up with poor behaviour than reveal that inadequacy.”

As adults, the goal is to understand this behaviour rather than respond to it.

“If a student is misbehaving or acting out, try to look for patterns, ask questions and get some other eyes in the room to observe. Try to understand what that behaviour is really communicating because it could be covering up some kind of anxiety,” Saint-Cyr says.

“To address anxiety, we usually want a team approach because it takes a plan of action. There are ways to help a student identify what’s really stressing them or bothering them or causing their anxiety. Then there are some strategies they can use.”

These strategies include helping the student gain self-awareness of their level of worry, which can be achieved by using a visual thermometer or five-point scale. This scale would include plans such as taking a break from the classroom or creating a signal to indicate that they need a little space. To help build confidence, the teacher could let students know in advance which questions will be asked in class, thereby reducing the uncomfortable feeling of being put on the spot. For tests, teachers can give students extra time and a quieter place to complete the task.

And if teachers are feeling the weight of worry themselves, Saint-Cyr offers some sage advice.

“One of the key ways that we can help ourselves with any stress or anxiety is to identify it. Then you can try to identify the things you’re thinking and telling yourself about that overwhelmed feeling. Instead of reinforcing the feeling of stress or anxiety with thinking patterns that aren’t helpful, you can find new scripts, new patterns and new strategies to overcome that debilitating feeling of stress,” she says.

“Planning priorities, knowing where you can get help, talking to yourself in a positive way to de-escalate stress, knowing how to exercise and breathe—all of those things are really good for stress.”

But not all worry is something to worry about, Moen adds.

“We’ve definitely identified that there is productive worry too. Worry is something that leads to motivation and change. So when the intensity of the demand increases, if our skill is able to match it, then we have flow or that profound sense of something really amazing being accomplished,” Moen says.

“But if our skill level is low and the demand is high, we’ll have anxiety. It is the dance. It is the relationship where we are in the moment. We all have lagging skills. We all have pits we fall in and stumble over.”



Pembina Trails high school students, with teachers Angela Fey and Vivian Courchene and UITC instructor Ryan Black

Photo credit: Donna Maxwell



# Life's improv

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BY DONNA MAXWELL

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If you think about it, a good part of our lives is spent in spontaneous situations. Sure, your day is planned out to a certain extent, and routine and structure are the staples that propel us through. But there are little scenes within every week, every day, yes, every moment of our lives that demand an impromptu response.

You could say we're improvising more often than we realize.

Aboriginal students in the Pembina Trails School Division are getting a lesson in life, through an improv arts program called 13th Flame, that will help them learn more about themselves and how to thrive in a world that will continually put them on the spot and ask them to work through whatever challenges the day brings.

"Improv is working without a script, making it up on the spot," said Tracey Zacharias, who wears several hats, including that of dramatic improv arts teacher at Fort Richmond Collegiate and director of Students on Stage (SOS), a non-profit, government-sponsored arts program that is piloting 13th Flame.

"It teaches so many skills. We look

at this as being definitely a career/arts training opportunity for Aboriginal youth because there isn't really much (for them), but we look at it too as, it's not just for drama and improv students in schools. It's for Aboriginal youth because what it's teaching them is teamwork skills, public speaking skills, leadership skills, as well as literacy skills. It definitely hits all the four areas."

Zacharias said SOS has teamed up with Urban Indigenous Theatre Company (UITC) to deliver 13th Flame to 70 students from eight Pembina Trails junior high and high schools.

The fact so many students signed up for a pilot program signals early success, and that attraction to 13th Flame buoyed Zacharias' spirit but also forced her to put a cap on it, just a little bit.

"The response has been really good. If anything there's more kids (that want in) but we kind of just said 'OK, that's what we can handle for now, for our first year, just to see how it works out,'" she said.

"We still want to guarantee quality of instruction."

Students took instant ownership of 13th

Flame, beginning with the fact Grade 11 student Sage Muswagon came up with the name for the program. Zacharias asked the Fort Richmond student if he



*Aboriginal students in the Pembina Trails School Division are getting a lesson in life, through an improv arts program called 13<sup>th</sup> Flame, that will help them learn more about themselves and how to thrive in a world that will continually put them on the spot and ask them to work through whatever challenges the day brings.*

was interested in signing up and then challenged him to name it.

Muswagon said it was easy.

“I have a really high respect for the elders,” Muswagon said. “My grandpa, he likes to talk a lot, and one talk that really came out to me was the Number

13. He said that in our culture it’s a sacred number.

“I respect that as he says. It’s commonly seen as an unlucky number but if my elder, my grandpa, has good faith in his teachings...then I like to respect it and make it so.”

Muswagon said he combined the number with flame because of fire’s importance in Aboriginal culture.

Aboriginal Academic Achievement teachers from the division accompany the students – who are split into groups from the east and west sides of the division – to the University of Manitoba’s Faculty of Education for three day-long sessions with UITS instructors Ryan Black and Kirk Ferland.

The day is broken down into two sections, with the first being devoted to lessons on Aboriginal teachings. Zacharias said it was important that they offer a sense of history and culture to the students.

“We definitely wanted...to teach improv, but what we also wanted was for a mentor and coach to be working with the kids for the Aboriginal perspective.”

Black, an actor who has been working in film, TV and theatre for 20 years and rose to fame in the movie *Dance Me Outside* and its TV spinoff, *The Rez*, said offering arts training like improv, especially the way 13th Flame does it -- with an emphasis on Aboriginal culture -- gives kids a great foundation for not just being on stage, but for the bigger performances of their lives.

“I consider theatre skills as life skills training. This isn’t just teaching kids to get up and do theatre as it’s been done before, this is teaching them to innovate, teaching them to think of new ways to live their lives, new things they want to do,” Black said.

“These kids are developing pathways in their brains faster than I ever will again. They’re the most creative they’ll ever be in their lifetimes.”

Black, who’s half Saulteaux Indian, half West Indian, said he felt like he didn’t belong anywhere when he was growing up in Winnipeg and admits he wasn’t a very good student. He understands fully why students were drawn to 13th Flame, because he was just like them when he was a teenager.

On a cold February day this year, he took the 13th Flame students through the Seven Sacred Teachings in the morning and then leapt into some fast-paced improv exercises that clearly had his charges engaged and acting out, in a good way.

And while he knows he’s teaching acting, he also knows the lessons will seep into other areas of the students’ lives, because he’s already lived it.

“Arts training has been demonstrated to increase academic performance, to increase youth and children’s abilities to develop healthy relationships with adults, with each other, to increase positive risk taking as opposed to negative risk behavior.

“There are papers out there and studies that have been done, this is just something intrinsic to my life, it’s why I was drawn to the arts as a young man who couldn’t get through high school and had all kinds of trouble.”

Zacharias said Black’s background made him perfect to lead the class. And he’s brought with him graduates, like Ferland, from the Aboriginal Arts Training and Mentorship program that was run out of the Manitoba Theatre for Young People. Zacharias has taught improv to SOS students for six years, but said Black and company are the right fit for the 13th Flame.

“To have (improv) taught from an Aboriginal perspective, the values that they have are incorporated into the teaching. I could teach improv or I could get other artists to come in and teach improv, but what’s missing is their perspective and so it’s just so nice to have that integrated into the teaching,” Zacharias said. “And the kids are just soaking that up ‘cause it’s from their perspective.”

The hope, she said, is that students will return to their schools with new skills that will help them become leaders, not just among the Aboriginal community within the school, but the entire population.

“They can take that back to their schools and they become the leaders in their schools because of the confidence they’re gaining through improv which is all about stepping forward with your own idea and being confident in it, and just trust your instincts and go for it.”

Black believes that if “kids walk out of the room feeling the same way they did when they came in, then we’re not doing our jobs.

“Our hope, at its core, would be ... that they come out of this with a clear sense of their own value in the world. Their own unique identity as an irreplaceable resource and that they have the freedom to choose to live well and to share joy and happiness and laughter with those around them.”

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
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Manitoba is home to two new “Outstanding Principals” who were honoured recently for their exceptional contribution to public schools. Ken Hoglund of École Stonewall Centennial School, and Peggy Hobson of Henry G. Izatt Middle School in Winnipeg received the Canada’s Outstanding Principal award sponsored by The Learning Partnership. The award, described as “The Oscars of the Education World”, recognizes principals from every province and territory in Canada who demonstrate innovation, entrepreneurial spirit and who have done something truly remarkable in public education. We spoke to the two principals about their accomplishments and philosophy in school leadership.

# THE HEAD OF THE

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BY MATEA TUHTAR

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## Ken Hoglund

For Ken Hoglund, who is retiring this year, receiving the award has been “a really nice way to round out my career.” When he read the letters of support for his nomination “I said that even if I don’t win an award, the letters from my colleagues, students and staff were just phenomenal. They are award enough.”

Hoglund has been a principal at Stonewall Centennial since 2000 and has worked hard to bring a number of changes to the school including introducing mandatory French for students in all four grades.

“I just felt that having any second language is so important,” says Hoglund. “Once the kids go across the street to the high school they can decide on their own if they want to continue taking French. But at least they get four years while they’re here.”

Hoglund also recognized the need for “life skills” in the school, which weren’t offered when he started. “I thought that kids should really have some basic life skills—they were going to the high school to use their programming.” Today the school offers sewing and cooking, and Hoglund says the kids ‘love the program’. “The kids tell me they’d rather go to home-ec than go to the sock-hop dance.”

Hoglund says he believes in inclusion and that everybody needs to be part of the school. For him, inclusion allows students to increase their self-esteem and flourish by being part of a class and the whole school. This is why his school plans an end of the year “Day of Celebration for All” where everybody in school gets acknowledged and celebrated for their achievement—no matter what that may be.

Hoglund’s been very involved with COSL (Council of School Leaders) and CAP (Canadian Association of Principals) for the last 20 years. “They called me the “Fossil on COSL” because I was one of the founding fathers”, he laughs.





# E CLASSES

When asked if he has any advice for other principals in Manitoba, Hoglund says “Enjoy what you’re doing—enjoy the kids. I always say when you have an issue, call sideways first—talk to your colleagues. We’re all in the same playing field.”

## Peggy Hobson

Peggy Hobson is described as “the driving force that makes Henry G. Izatt Middle School (HGI) a place for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning”. With 26 years of experience as a school administrator, her current position as principal at HGI is right where she wants to be as she says “I have a love for middle years.”

Hobson says she knew of The Learning Partnership award but didn’t know the magnitude of it. “Humbling is the first word that comes to mind. It’s a major life thing to be acknowledged at that level.”

Technology is changing the face of education, and for Hobson that’s very exciting.

“I firmly believe that because of the world’s access to information, and the way we are processing thought collectively, we have to change some of the things we do at school to help our students get ready for a world of employment that we might not even know what it’s going to be.”

This has prompted Hobson to build a ‘bring your own device’ environment at the school for students to conduct queries and research, and where students can make a choice how they’re going to demonstrate their learning. Hobson also founded the HGI’s Student Technology Leadership Group where students from Grades 5-9 present ideas to other schools about how to blend technology and learning.

“The foundation of what we do is digital citizenship and trust,” says Hobson. “The more we approach enquiry based learning, the more they’re engaged and the more they demonstrate that trust.”

Another thing she’s noticed with bringing technology to the classroom is the equity it has created in her students.

“I never expected to see the sharing of devices and the sliding across the table. The collaborative nature of kids is there and their sincere willingness to be involved. That’s what excites me as a principal.”

Hobson believes in foundational leadership, and that students should have a say in their learning through student leadership teams on a number of initiatives, as well as inviting students to staff meetings for their input. Many students are involved in passion projects such as starting clothing drives to help the homeless.

Hobson has also instituted “Flex-Time” where a half-day a cycle



is spent with the homeroom teachers and the students can use the time to work on assignments, get extra help with their work, or go out in the community for projects.

Hobson says she loves being a principal because she loves kids and people in general.

“For me it’s unlocking the possibilities or new ways to have people engage in what they do, and feel success.”

For more information about The Learning Partnership Outstanding Principals award visit [www.thelearningpartnership.ca](http://www.thelearningpartnership.ca).

# Supt. retires from **unique job**

BY MATEA TUHTAR

It's no small feat running a school division that provides educational services to the largest geographical area in Canada, operates schools in tiny hard-to-reach communities, and encompasses diverse communities spanning over 75 per cent of Manitoba.

Add to that the complexity of communities that have multiple languages and unique strengths and challenges.

But for Ray Derksen, Chief Superintendent of Frontier School Division, it's all been "exciting, and lots of fun."

Derksen is retiring this year after five years as Chief Superintendent, and a career of working in Manitoba's north. From his start as a teacher in Moose Lake, he quickly moved into administrative work as vice-principal and principal, superintendent and today Chief Superintendent of Frontier.

He also served as president of the Frontier Teachers' Association.

"I have been proud to have had some small part in working with and leading one of the most innovative, creative, and energetic school divisions in Manitoba, if not Canada," with a proud and admitted bias.

He may have a point.

The Division sprawls across 440,000 square kilometers and is mandated to provide educational services to all children wherever they live, no matter how remote.

"I can say with some certainty that we're the only division in Manitoba that operates a formal bus route with a snowmobile and sleigh."

Schools range in size from 5-1,100 students, encompassing communities that include six distinct Aboriginal peoples. And its governance, too, is unique.

"Nobody else has this (our governance)," says Derksen. "Almost all of our communities are a split – a percentage of provincial and federal funding. We have 14 different reserve schools and 40 different communities across Manitoba."

And community is an emphasis. Local governance is the most important piece in

the division, with communities electing committees that hire all the staff for that school. Community members have access to training and support to excel as school leaders.

"Each place gets to shape what their system looks like," he says. "It's the lowest level possible of decision making in the community – so it's not the big city telling a little community what's best for them."

There are three tiers of elected leadership in the division that ensure the unique voices of every community are heard. Frontier also acts as landlord, providing housing, water and sewage systems to over 300 teacher housing units. The division has a lot of moving parts and it's been Derksen's job to make sure they mesh.

"You have to lead using your expertise, your moral suasion and the loyalty of the folks who work for you, because so much can go wrong," he says. This has meant a lot of travelling to meet people face-to-face. Recently the school board and all superintendents spent three days camping in the bush and held their board meeting there.

"We brought in elders from across the division and they talked to us about their views on education and what they wanted to see in the school system."

Another challenge for Frontier and Derksen has been bringing opportunity in an equitable manner to people no matter where they live. Derksen says that's key to opening the door to the future for students.

"I want to see all the kids graduate for sure, but you're going to change graduation rates through programs that engage kids and make them love going to school every day. We have so many innovative programs that are designed to keep kids in school."

There is the Frontier Games where students from across the division gather for activities such as archery, soccer, x-country skiing and trap setting.

Fiddling is another program Derksen cites. More than 2,200 kids participate, with nine travelling fiddling instructors touring the division. The kids all come



together for a Fiddle Jam festival in May for three days with some of the top fiddlers from across the country.

And in an area where food security is a big issue, the division has been promoting and helping communities develop the capacity to grow their own food through green houses, micro gardening and school gardens, through their science-based curriculum, Veggie Adventures.

Still programs aren't what he is most proud of.

"Programs come and go. I would say I am most proud of the staff I am surrounded by, the Board I serve and the hundreds of people from our communities that volunteer on our school committees. All these people, staff and volunteers, have the same goal – that making every child's day the best it can be. That's what I am proud of."

Derksen faces new adventures as he retires to a little farm in Saskatchewan where he plans to grow garlic, unusual vegetables and raise specialty chickens.

"I'm looking forward to devoting my attention to farming and see if I can grow the best vegetables and best chickens that I can. We'll see how it goes!"



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# PORTFOLIO

## WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

A San Francisco church, Saint Mary's Cathedral, was found to have a novel way of helping the city's homeless.

It installed a sprinkler system to keep the homeless from sleeping on its property. The sprinkler system goes on every hour or so after sunset and soaks anyone in its four doorways. Station KCBS reported seeing the system soak homeless people and their belongings.

The church apparently overlooked Isaiah 58:7: "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house ...?" Or maybe they just prefer Job 24:8: "They are wet with the mountain rains and hug the rock for want of shelter."



## Tax hockey Jets more! Bring home

BY GEORGE STEPHENSON

The countdown has begun on the next season for The Winnipeg Jets.

There has been the usual analysis that the team is just one or two players short of greatness and that the future is so bright you can't look at it without a welder's helmet.

But what will be overlooked is that the team would rocket to fabledom if only we taxed its players more.

At least that seems to be the accidental conclusion of a study that's been kicking around about NHL tax rates done by the so-called Canadian Taxpayers' Federation.

The study, unveiled at the beginning of the season, was supposed to show how teams in locations where tax rates are

lower have an advantage over higher-taxed locations.

As it said, the first "purpose of the report is to point out that income taxes have a major impact on where highly skilled, highly mobile individuals will reside, using NHL players as the example."

It supports the claim by pointing out that of 123 free agents signed last year, 57 per cent went to teams in lower-taxed locations.

The anti-tax group suggested that Toronto is a good example. It said that despite having the highest revenue of any NHL team, it's "on the higher end of tax rates."

"Maybe that can be another excuse for why they haven't won a cup since 1967," the report says. "Take a break from blaming your team's management and consider blaming high taxes for why your team can't seem to end that rut." Toronto, it says, has the 22nd highest tax rate.

Welly, well, that's pretty clear.

So, how did those low-taxed teams do this year compared with those that don't get any high-skilled players because their taxes are too high?

According to the federation, the top three low-tax teams were the Edmonton Oilers, Calgary Flames and Florida Panthers. Edmonton and Florida were in the bottom half of the standings and Calgary in the middle.

According to the federation, the top three overly-taxed teams were Montreal Canadiens, Los Angeles Kings and San Jose Sharks. Despite being crushed by the burden of high taxes, all finished higher than Edmonton and Florida, with Montreal second in the NHL.

Which just proves, well, not much, actually.

But if, as the taxpayers' association suggests, we compare taxes and hockey standings, the moral of the story is that governments should tax hockey players more and then bask in the glow of hockey gold, or, more accurately, a large silver trophy.

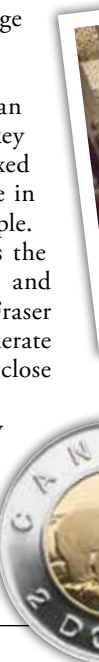
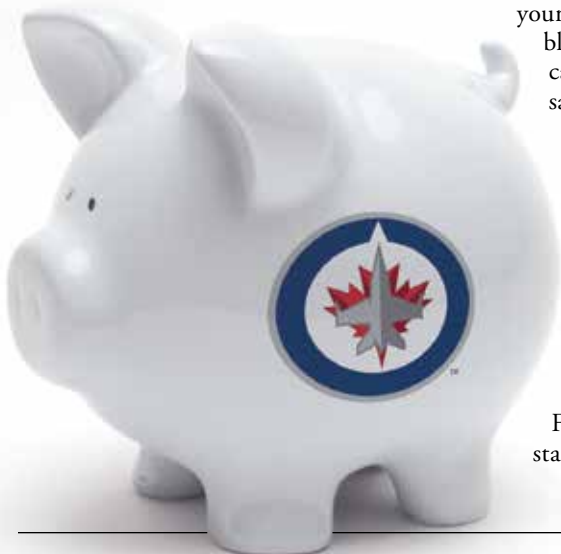
Yes, it's ridiculous.

But it's no more ridiculous than churning out a study, using hockey teams, that concludes lower-taxed locations somehow have an advantage in attracting the most highly-skilled people.

The only skill these reports show is the ability of the taxpayers' federation and fellow anti-tax crusaders like the Fraser Institute to issue reports that generate publicity, but that fall apart under close scrutiny.

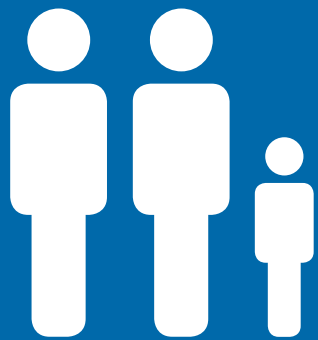
Unfortunately, the media rarely scrutinize the reports and simply repeat these organization's press releases and not look any further.

As [pressprogress.ca](http://pressprogress.ca) has reported,





# INCOME \$PLITTING PARTY



Not all Conservatives are enamoured with the idea of income splitting. Michael Taube, a former speechwriter for PM Stephen Harper, says it's "the equivalent of state-run socialism for the wealthy. A few of us will shift income to get a tax credit directly from the government, paid for by taxpayers."

No matter, others are still on board. Jack Mintz, a University of Calgary professor, told a conservative conference that it's great because it will allow parents to "stay at home" so they can do "chores at home that you would otherwise have to hire people to do."

Good thinking, professor.



## Bad Start

In announcing its new digital version, The Free Press gave online viewers a sneak peek at what the home page will look like, complete with two misspellings in headlines.

# the Cup!

the Canadian Employee Relocation Council recently found that only one-third of Canadians could be persuaded to move. For those who would, professional advancement, raises and the ability to accommodate spouses' employment were the biggest incentives.

And the sports' network ESPN polled NHL agents on the factors hockey players consider when deciding on which team they would play for. Not one cited taxes as a consideration.



## GOOGLER MALFUNCTION

The Associated Press sent out what is now a classic correction of its story on the March 16 arrest of 71-year-old real estate tycoon Robert Durst.

The Associated Press reported erroneously that Robert Durst is a member of a band. He is a real estate heir; Fred Durst is the former frontman of Limp Bizkit.



#pushups



#moneyphone



## Tops on Twitter

Actress Anna Kendrick on the announcement that Apple has a \$10,000 gold watch available:

"We should be thanking Apple for launching the \$10,000 'apple watch' as the new gold standard in douchebag detection."

# Mat leave success in some associations

BY MATEA TUHTAR

For years it's been an unwritten practice that teachers who were thinking of having a baby avoided the due date of late spring/early summer because they would lose their maternity top up over the summer months. That's no longer the case for five school associations in Manitoba. Thompson, Whiteshell, Border Land, Frontier and Evergreen Teachers' Associations have settled to include new terms in their collective agreements regarding maternity leaves.

Effective July 1, 2015, a teacher taking maternity leave and/or parental leave in these teacher associations will be entitled to receive a full 90 per cent of gross salary maternity top up for a full 135 teaching days, regardless of when they have their baby. While regular school breaks like summer, Christmas and Spring Break, are still not paid, the new agreement will have teachers be able to 'pause' their top up over those breaks, and have it resume after the break is over. Thus

a teacher who has a baby at the end of June will not lose 9 weeks of maternity top up like in previous years. Her top up would start in September once school resumes.

"This is a big equity issue," says Society Staff Officer Nancy Kerr. "Essentially it's giving women control back of their own bodies."

**"This is a big equity issue, essentially it's giving women control back of their own bodies."**

*- Nancy Kerr, MTS Staff Officer*

Kerr notes that previous maternity benefits were unfair – with some teachers getting most of their 135 day top up, while others lost weeks of payment just because of when their babies were due. "It simply doesn't make sense that one woman starts her maternity leave at one time during the year, another at a different

time, and both receive widely differing amounts of maternity leave top up."

The problem has been that for more than 15 years, maternity top up has been treated by school divisions as a salary replacement issue – not a benefit. Kerr says that grievances have been filed in a number of divisions over the issue, and that changes to date are largely due to women who were willing to file grievances.

This win is a huge step for maternity benefits and the hope is that other associations will follow suit in the future. "This is not a huge monetary increase for Divisions," says Kerr, "in most cases, they're already paying out at least 125 to 130 of 135 possible days."

"The majority of our members are female. The benefit to women is that it allows them to stay home comfortably with their babies for 6 months of the crucial first year of life, without suffering serious financial hardship. If the education sector can't be supportive of women having children, then who can?"

# Whole schools active at Heritage Fair

BY MATEA TUHTAR

There's no better place to learn about our Canadian heritage than the annual Red River Heritage Fair. Students from Niji Mahkwa School in Winnipeg were just some who took part in the Fair on May 7th. The students got a chance to show off their heritage research projects which included Louis Riel, the Group of Seven, and Canadian actor Adam Beach.

"Two years ago when Niji Mahkwa first went to the Fair, there was just one project and two students," says Grade 3/4 teacher Teresa Jackson. "Now it has grown to a whole school effort."

Niji Mahkwa also held its own heritage fair at the school with the theme of Aboriginal Heroes. The whole school participated in that fair, with some students then going on to present at the Red River

Fair. When they weren't presenting at their booths, the students got to attend a few sessions and activities, including a very popular scavenger hunt with prizes.

**"It was fun! I liked the activities. I liked getting judged because lots of people came to our board."**

**"This is the best day of my life!"**

*- Students, Niji Mahkwa School*

"The kids had a great time," says Jackson. "They all got medals of participation, with one of our students also winning a sports award for his project on Carey Price. I'd definitely recommend it to other teachers – it's a great experience!"



# Thank you teachers

for helping shape the **leaders of tomorrow.**



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