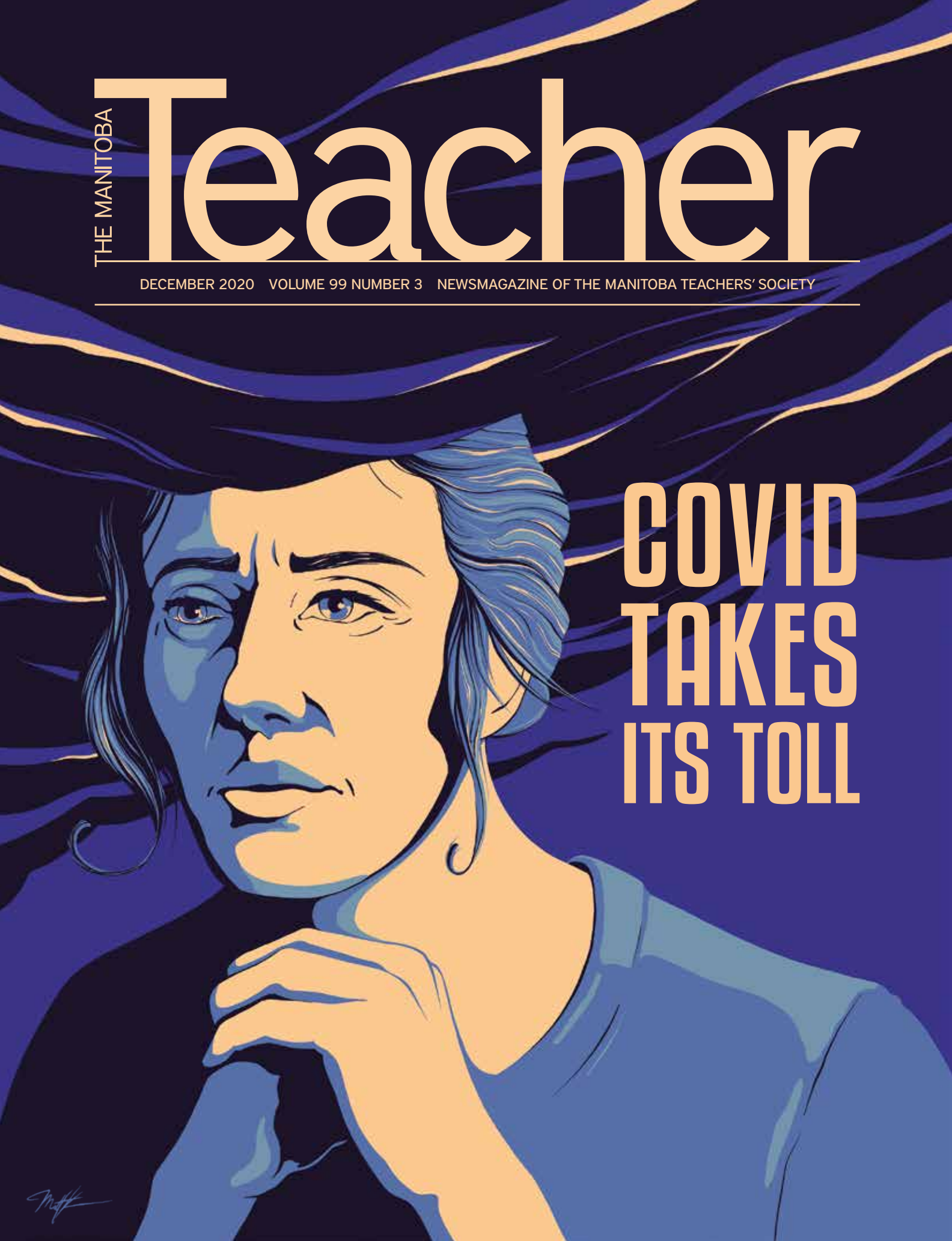


THE MANITOBA

# Teacher

DECEMBER 2020 VOLUME 99 NUMBER 3 NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY

**COVID  
TAKES  
ITS TOLL**



*Meff*

# Maternity & Parental Leave



Are you planning to take maternity and/or parental leave? Information is available on our website at ***mbteach.org*** or contact:

**Ashleigh Deeley Michaluk, Staff Officer, Teacher Welfare**

The Manitoba Teachers' Society  
Teacher Welfare Department  
191 Harcourt Street  
Winnipeg MB R3J 3H2

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**Email:** [amichaluk@mbteach.org](mailto:amichaluk@mbteach.org)

**Virtual Maternity and Parental Leave Seminars from 4:30 to 5:30 PM on:**

**Tuesday, December 15, 2020 | Tuesday, January 19, 2021 | Tuesday, February 23, 2021 | Tuesday, March 23, 2021**

Please email [amichaluk@mbteach.org](mailto:amichaluk@mbteach.org) to register.



# THE MANITOBA Teacher

DECEMBER 2020 VOLUME 99 NUMBER 3 NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

**JAMES BEDFORD**

Each year, in early November, The Manitoba Teachers' Society conducts a membership poll. We've come to rely greatly on the information shared by our members, data that permit us to see trends, identify emerging issues, and ensure that MTS is aligned with the explicit, articulated needs of teachers. This year, for obvious reasons, that poll has never been more important. Details of its results can be found on pages 12 and 13 of this issue.

The Society hears from members in a variety of other ways, as well. Since the pandemic first shuttered schools to in-person learning in March, more than 1,000 members have shared their experiences via our social media channels, through phone calls and emails to Local presidents and myself, and through contacts with our Teacher Welfare staff. In addition, MTS members participated in a poll on mental health commissioned by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF/FCE). And, in October, the MTS Council of School Leaders (COSL) surveyed Manitoba's teacher leaders about their specific concerns and COVID-related hurdles, as they endeavor to provide safe and sustainable learning environments.

All of this information was collected recently; however, its nature and impact morph by the day, if not the hour, making it hard to render a clear and definitive picture of the public education landscape in Manitoba. Yet one thing is clear: the tone and content of emails, voice mails and comments we receive from members has grown darker and increasingly concerning.

Our members are teaching in multiple classrooms at the same time. They are teaching both in-class and remotely at the same time. Some are teaching regular classes and substituting for colleagues, many losing prep time and breaks, contrary to their collective agreements. Hour upon hour of additional, unpaid time is devoted to work, often at the expense of personal and family time so important for our own mental and physical well-being. Inconsistent interpretation of provincial protocols across divisions has not helped, either. It is not hard to understand how all of this has steadily corroded the resilience and emotional well-being of our members.

You may be familiar with the time-honoured MTS mantra: "Teachers' working conditions are students' learning conditions". Our survey data indicates that more than 90 per cent of you are feeling very stressed or somewhat stressed due to the working conditions you face each day—think about that. A statistic so alarming cannot be ignored. It signals the very real possibility that our public school system is in peril, and without immediate support, our school communities could face deeply damaging, long-term social and economic impact. Rest assured, MTS will not give up. We will continue to advocate for you and for the resources you need to work safely and sustainably.

If a few thousand school teachers cannot sway the premier, perhaps this will: our public education system is essential to economic recovery. It cannot be maintained if teachers are pushed to breaking. We need him to listen. We need him to act. Now!

Premier Pallister continually reminds us that "we are all in this together." What will it take for him to recognize and respond to teachers and school leaders who feel very much alone?



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## INSIDE MTS WHERE IS MY UNION?

**DANIELLE FULLAN KOLTON, PH.D.**, GENERAL SECRETARY

**M**ore than eight months ago, we found ourselves face-to-face with COVID, and the reality of what this meant for teachers engulfed us. Very quickly, we pivoted to support and protect public school teachers, principals, clinicians, and substitutes in a pandemic context.

A central decision loomed: Step back and voice opposition as the provincial government acted or lean in and accept the invitation to be part of discussions. We took a seat at the table – several tables, actually – and used it to be the voice of our members and to propose solutions in the way forward.

To have any success at those tables, we needed to be clear on our core interests and positions and resolute in our roles and goals. This collaboration and advocacy took many forms: meetings with education stakeholders, technical briefings, letters to the minister, letters to the deputy minister, publications (*Positions and Concerns; Actions and Reactions; Teachers Speak Out*), follow up emails, member and public polling, and media saturation. At last count, this amounted to well over 145 communications.

And these continue.

In addition to the provincial Response Planning Team, we are members of three working groups on remote learning, and we lead an education stakeholder committee on teacher mental health and wellbeing.

To be clear, we have not been ignored, and agreements and successes have marked the journey. This does not mean we have been walking hand-in-hand over smooth ground. There have been instances of disagreement, tension, stress, and strain.

Along the way, we have celebrated our work and influence in the mandatory mask order for grades 4-12, suspension of the January grade 12 exams, and return of the three non-instructional days lost at the beginning of the year. Heightening awareness about workload and teacher stress has been a steadfast focus. This, in addition to many, many of our non-contentious suggestions and feedback that were adopted by the government.

And we're not done.

While pressing for further changes, we have also been gathering information from teachers, school leaders, parents and the

general public. We commissioned a poll of public school teachers to hear first-hand what they are facing. A story on that poll can be found on page 12. We recently completed a second poll to gather the thoughts of parents and the public. And we have canvassed school leaders to see what unique challenges they are facing.

All this information guides us in our discussions with government and provides support for the outstanding issues we continue to confront and publicize through our various platforms and mainstream media.

### Among those issues are:

- Unreasonable workload for teachers doing blended learning (teaching in-person and remote learners);
- Unreasonable workload for teachers teaching multiple sets of learners across multiple physical locations (duplex teaching);
- Unreasonable workload for principals responsible for contact tracing;
- Compliance with physical distancing in schools;
- Workforce shortages;
- Access to public health support and rapid COVID-19 testing for school staff; and
- Support for teacher mental health.

We have several levers that we consider carefully in our advocacy and action: labour protocols and grievance action, member campaigns, and media releases to name a few. Imagine that these levers are on a continuum ranging from private conversations to negotiations with school divisions to public pressure to legal action. We must choose wisely for maximum impact.

Over the past eight months we have received more than 1,200 comments and questions and personal stories from members. We have responded to almost all. And while we are unable to resolve every problem, they are top of mind as we examine and propose solutions.

We will continue to press forward in our work on behalf of members knowing that their experiences and opinions vary greatly.



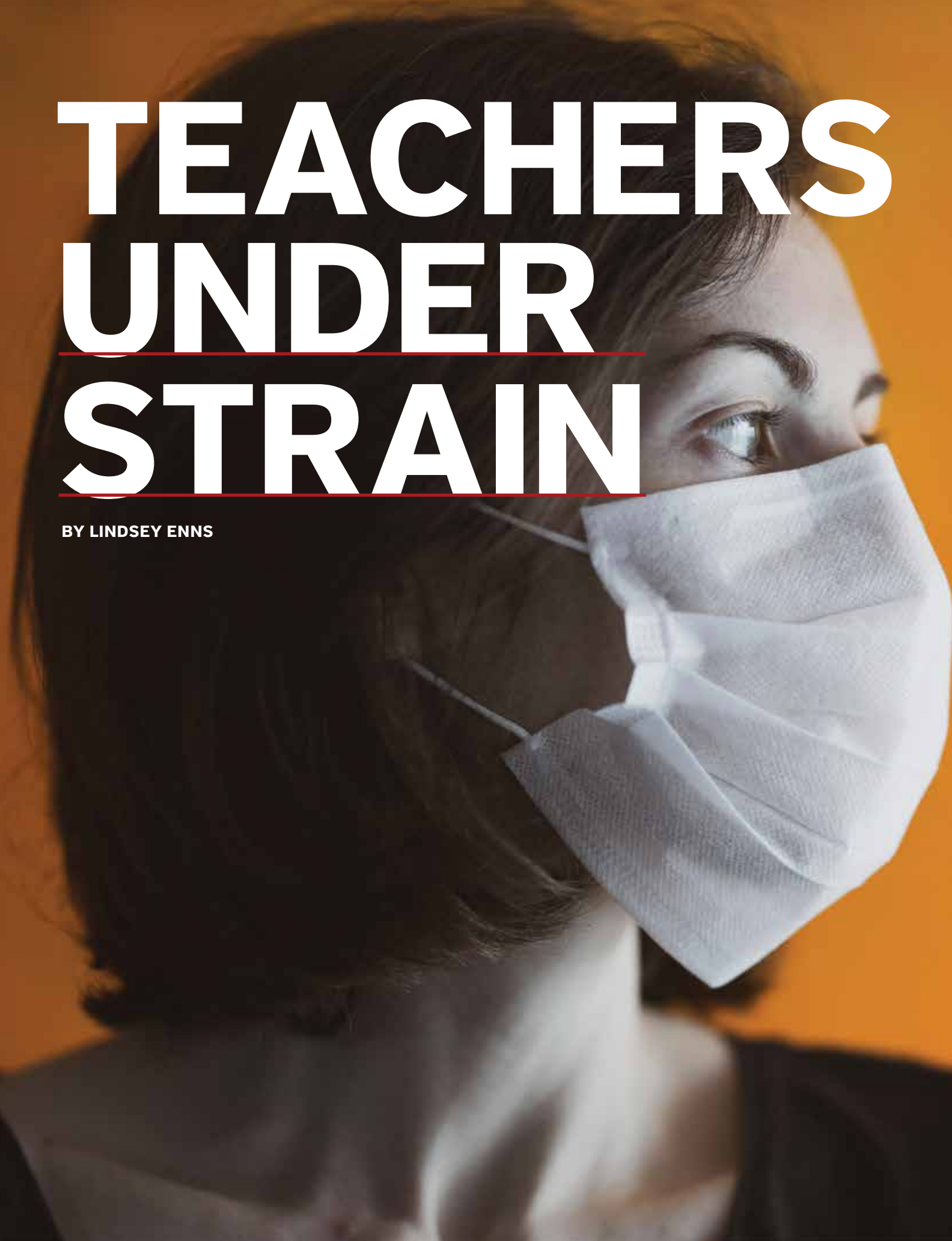
Some would like all schools to go to remote learning, others tell us schools must remain open to in-person teaching. Some say they are getting along fine, while many more tell us they are at the breaking point. Some want us to walk away from the table, others insist that we “flip” the table.

Although pandemic advocacy demands our attention, the other very important work of the Society does not stop. Staff continue working tirelessly on the Pembina Trails interest arbitration, celebrating the arbitration award on maternity top-up pay in Winnipeg School Division, filing a variety of grievances, supporting members in teacher welfare issues and the Educator Assistance Program, collaborating with our post-secondary partners, working in social justice areas, developing and facilitating virtual professional learning, and following relevant legislation (Bill 45, Bill 16, Bill 64).

So, we intend to stay at the table where we have input and influence. Your voice and your feedback informs this work and drives the narrative, and we count on you to stay connected to us.

We have heard some members ask, “Where is my union?” To this, we answer with pride, “We are in every Local, we are at the table, we are in the media, we are championing your voices. We are here, and we are working for you.”



A close-up, profile view of a woman with dark hair, wearing a white surgical mask. She is looking upwards and to the right. The background is a solid, warm orange color. The title 'TEACHERS UNDER STRAIN' is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif capital letters. The words 'TEACHERS' and 'UNDER' are on the first line, 'STRAIN' is on the second line, and a thin red horizontal line separates the two lines of text.

# TEACHERS UNDER STRAIN

BY LINDSEY ENNS

## Months of overwhelming stress coupled with a never-ending workload has left teachers feeling the full weight of the pandemic and its effects on their own mental health and wellbeing like never before.

"Teachers are getting worn out. I don't know how else to put it than that," said Cale Dunbar, president of the Brandon Teachers' Association, which consists of around 700 members. "There's not enough time in the day to do what they're being asked to do."

The Society's Disability Benefits Plan (DBP) and Educator Assistance Program (EAP) are seeing an increase in calls for supports and services this year. DBP is currently seeing the highest number of members taking medical leave at this time of the school year than they have in the past 10 years. EAP had the busiest September in recent years and is seeing a steady influx of requests for their virtual counselling services.

The department says some of the issues members are facing include workload demands and burnout, feelings of chaos and exhaustion, anxiety over their own health and safety and that of their students, lack of clarity and follow through on regulations, day to day uncertainty about changes that might be coming, as well as difficulty coping with increased personal demands.

"We're only a few months into the school year and people are exhausted as if we're nearing the end of the school year," Dunbar said. "Somethings gotta give and I hope we can find some ways to help them cope."

One teacher said she began feeling anxious when schools across Manitoba were moved to the restricted orange level of the province's pandemic response system.

"I am luckier than others because

of my experience with depression and anxiety. I know a lot of strategies but also these experiences have helped me put things into perspective and allowed me to not worry about the little things that comes with the pandemic," she said. "I would never wish what I went through on anybody but it has given me a good sense of perspective when dealing with the changes we are facing."

Another teacher said teaching in code orange is a lot harder than people realize.

"I'm about as stressed as I've ever been," he said. "The last time I felt this overwhelmed was during my first year teaching."

"I feel like all I do all day long is run."

A total of 56.1 per cent of teachers said they are feeling "very stressed" and 37.2 per cent said they felt "somewhat stressed" about teaching this school year, according to an MTS membership poll, which wrapped up Oct. 27. When asked what their main concern for this school year was, 33.1 per cent of participants said "student/staff health/safety/following protocols," 18.5 per cent said "quality of education/recovery learning/attendance," and 13.6 per cent said "student/staff mental health/burnout/meeting needs." When asked how concerned are you about your ability to maintain your own health this school year, 48.6 per cent said "somewhat concerned" while 37.3 per cent said "very concerned."

One teacher said he interacts with nearly 120 students per day and is worried about getting sick.

"It's always a concern," he said. "I don't want to get sick and pass it on to my family as well."

He says the current demands, workload and expectations being placed on teachers this year just isn't sustainable.

"This shouldn't be doable for a week," he said. "When I get home I'm mentally done. I'm just exhausted."

And it's not just teachers who are feeling the pains of the pandemic.

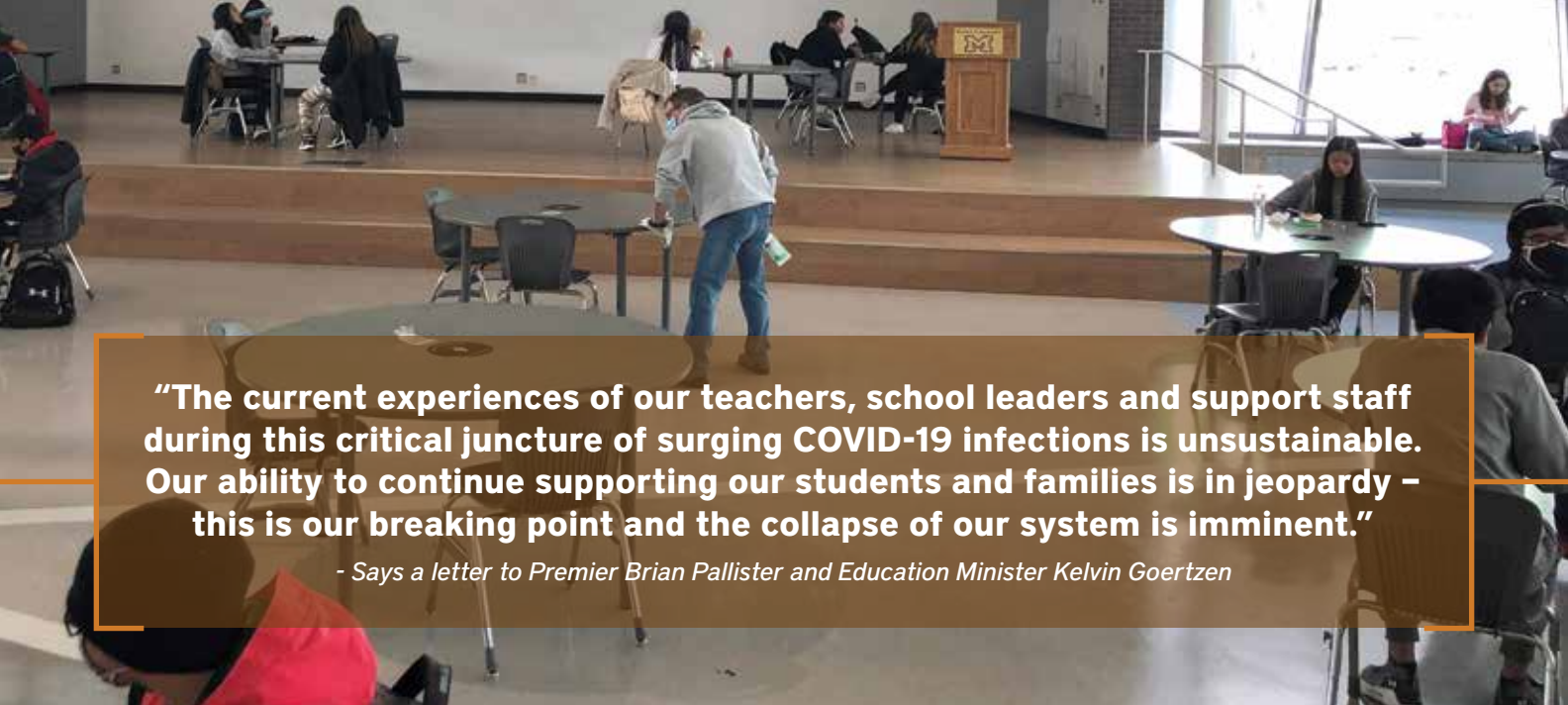
According to Morneau Shepell's Mental Health Index for the month of October, nearly half (48 per cent) of Canadian workers reported needing some form of mental health support. The most commonly reported source of mental health support is from family members (24 per cent), followed by support from friends or co-workers (20 per cent) and support from a mental health professional (eight per cent).

Nine per cent of individuals reported needing support, but have not sought it. Respondents working in education reported an increase in mental stress score (65.1) compared to the prior month. This survey by Morneau Shepell, was conducted through an online survey in English and French from Sept. 28 to Oct. 19, 2020, with 3,000 respondents in Canada.

### SPEAKING OUT

Nearly 500 teachers and school support staff signed an open letter in early November calling on the provincial government to implement measures to ensure schools are safe for staff and students.

"The current experiences of our teachers, school leaders and support staff during this critical juncture of surging COVID-19 infections is unsustainable," says the letter to Premier Brian Pallister and Education Minister Kelvin Goertzen. "Our ability to continue supporting our students



**"The current experiences of our teachers, school leaders and support staff during this critical juncture of surging COVID-19 infections is unsustainable. Our ability to continue supporting our students and families is in jeopardy – this is our breaking point and the collapse of our system is imminent."**

*- Says a letter to Premier Brian Pallister and Education Minister Kelvin Goertzen*

and families is in jeopardy – this is our breaking point and the collapse of our system is imminent."

The letter outlined needed measures the Society has been pressing the government to implement for some time. The Society has called on members to "use their voice" to reinforce MTS's efforts. The educators also want the province to show where it is spending the \$85.4 million it received from the federal government for school safety.

"MTS leadership shares the concerns of these public school teachers, school leaders, clinicians and staff. We welcome their voice and courage," said MTS president James Bedford. "MTS has repeatedly called for the release of federal funds intended specifically to address our schools' pandemic-related needs. While that money has flowed in other provinces, it has trickled, at best, here in Manitoba."

The letter points to examples where teachers are teaching both in-class students and others remotely at the same time. As well, it says schools in Manitoba are experiencing high levels of "failure-to-fills" when a job is unfilled by a substitute teacher. It also points out that principals are conducting preliminary contact-tracing investigations after being contacted by families because of delays in official contact tracing.

Teachers are also balancing remote and in class learning, which means one teacher could be responsible for up to

three groups of students at one time while maintaining physical distancing.

"Schools aren't built with a pandemic in mind," one teacher said. "I'm literally going class by class. We're stressed and we need help."

### **FINDING WAYS TO COPE**

One teacher who has been working with an EAP counsellor since last year says she felt "super lucky" to be able to have that support.

"Once COVID hit, the stress became harder and it was great to easily be able to call up and get back to 'seeing' a counsellor again," she said. "I have found working with an EAP counsellor to be better than a regular counsellor as normally my issues are more related to work and my counsellor only talks to teachers so has more experience in this area and has a lot of useful and helpful strategies."

Some of the things that have been working for her include establishing boundaries that allow her to focus on what's important and what needs to be done first when facing many tasks. She also enjoys listening to various types of instrumental music, spending time outdoors as well as other calming activities like deep breathing and laying under a weighted blanket.

When asked what advice she would offer others currently struggling with their own mental health, she said it's important to identify that you are not OK and to always ask for help.

"The EAP counsellors are a service we are lucky to have access to through MTS. They should be able to help you out or help you go in the right direction to find help."

It's very important to speak up about your own mental health, she added.

"I really can't stress the importance of getting help," she added. "So many teachers that I know are struggling with their mental health right now but don't know how to get help or don't feel comfortable asking for it. Your life is much easier to deal with your struggles when you are able to have counselling sessions."

The Society would also like members to know that MTS Staff Officers are there for support and advocacy to ensure workplaces are as safe as possible, EAP services are available for individual counselling and teachers have an extended health benefit package which provides them with coverage for counselling in the community.

The Society also has a digital wellness platform, LifeSpeak, which offers videos, podcasts and web chats with industry experts on a variety of topics including dedicated resources related to COVID-19.

Other online resources The Society recommends that aren't specific to teachers include AbilitiCBT, an internet-based cognitive behavioral therapy program, Self-Compassion with Dr. Kristin Neff, and Anxiety Canada.



# Let LifeSpeak help you learn how to manage the effects of the pandemic on your mental health.



From the fear of the unknown and loneliness, to sudden life changes and the constant reminders of the daily number of cases, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a lot of stress and anxiety.

With the LifeSpeak library, you have access to many of North America's top experts in the fields of mental health and wellness. Check out your LifeSpeak library in order to learn to cope with your stress and anxiety, and build resilience as well.

## Topics covered include:

- Learning about loneliness and how to connect with others.
- Using mindfulness as a tool for positive action.
- Managing anxiety about wearing masks.
- Designing a work schedule to fit your current environment.
- And so much more!

## Access information:



Accessing your LifeSpeak account is easy.

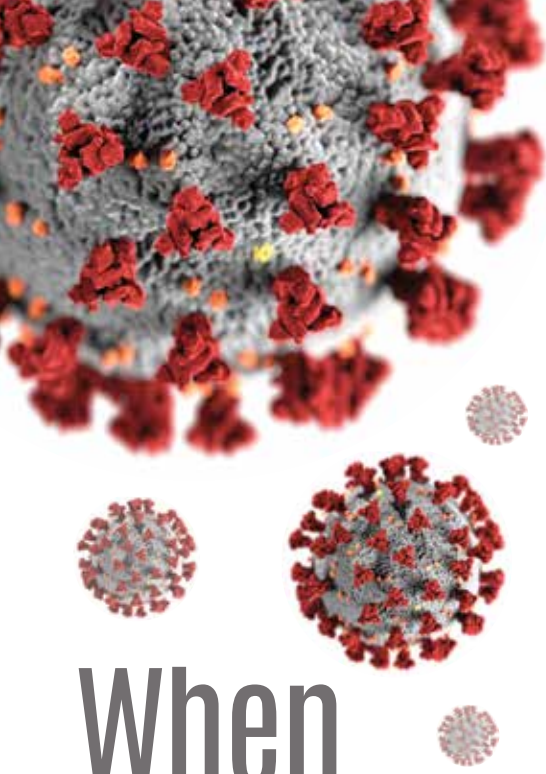
Scan the QR code or simply enter the **URL:** [mbteach.lifespeak.com](https://mbteach.lifespeak.com) and access through the group account with the **password: MTSBalance**

Your access is 100% confidential.

Encourage your family members to log in as well - send your family members a Family Welcome Kit so that they can enjoy LifeSpeak too.



Download the LifeSpeak app now at your device app store or scan the QR code. Enter **client name:** [mbteach](https://mbteach.lifespeak.com) and client **password: MTSBalance**



# When COVID comes to CLASS

BY LINDSEY ENNS

More than 160 schools in Manitoba have been impacted by COVID-19 exposures since the beginning of the school year. In September alone, COVID-19 exposures affected 32 schools in Winnipeg and that number has since grown to include nearly 120.

Maples Collegiate Principal Scott Shier said their school has reported five positive COVID-19 cases and although they've been planning since March, it's been a "wake up call" for their school community.

"I spoke to the students involved and they were a little shook up," Shier said during a telephone interview on Nov. 10. "We have to be safe and we want to keep coming to school. Our students do not want to go into lockdown again."

As of Nov. 9, Manitoba recorded 445 cases of COVID-19 in schools. A total of 332 of those cases were students and 113 were school staff members. Some of those cases have been linked to outbreaks. In early November, Manitoba had four active COVID-19 outbreaks at schools and one school where an outbreak was declared over.

Dr. Brent Roussin, the province's top doctor, has repeatedly said schools will see more cases as COVID-19 continues to spread throughout communities. He has also insisted that in-class learning is important for both students and families and that schools are a safe place to be.

"We know there's so much value in having our kids in school," Roussin said during a recent news conference. He also went on to thank schools for being "fantastic partners" in ensuring COVID-19 isn't being spread between staff and students during school hours.

Schools are also being commended for doing their own contact tracing and in some cases notifying their school community before public health.

"We were fortunate that we weren't the first school to have a positive case," Shier said. "Our teachers have been really proactive."

The Pembina Trails School Division has created its own contact tracing system, which uses QR codes to keep track of high school students and compile spreadsheets of who has been where in their schools.

The division has put up these codes in common spaces, such as libraries and cafeterias, and students have to scan their phones when entering these areas. Students without a camera phone have to fill out a physical form instead.

Winnipeg School Division (WSD) has also implemented a QR code-based check-in system for all of its schools and buildings.

"All it asks is your name and phone number and there's also an opportunity for an email or a home address," said Kristin Insull, WSD's organizational development officer. "In the moment of a confirmed or suspected case at a school ... it reduces that data collection down to seconds."



The Society has also heard from various school administrators that having a positive COVID case in their school has caused even more stress among school staff.

Chance Henderson, president of the Mountain View Teachers' Association, says he recently checked in with a school in the Mountain View School Division that experienced a positive COVID case to offer his support.

"I was deeply concerned about their wellbeing," Henderson said during a telephone interview on Nov. 17. "It's certainly not an easy thing to go through."

Henderson says he believes there needs to be supports in place to help staff with their mental health after they experience a COVID exposure event within their school.

"We can't let teachers crash and burn in these scenarios," he added. "It's great that we have planned to act urgently to protect physical health, but where is the action to protect psychological health?"

"This type of news is traumatic. Teachers are very much duty oriented ... but at the end of the day those that I spoke to were utterly exhausted."

In rural schools, everyone pitches in to help out, Henderson said.

"The reality is in a rural division the total resources we have are significantly different than what a larger urban school division would have," he said.

Shier said at Maples Collegiate they have been trying to make the best use of spaces throughout their school. Students now scan in and out when they leave common areas, such as the library and they have opened up more spaces for students to use during lunch time.

He said it's important schools be as transparent as they can with their school staff, community and students during this time.

"We want them to know that we're doing our best to keep everyone in the school."

# SCHOOL LEADERS, HEARD

In the October/November issue of The Manitoba Teacher, we featured comments from teachers reflecting on the reality of their classrooms – the frontline of education. In this issue, we turn to teacher leaders for their perspective.

In October, the MTS Council of School Leaders (COSL) polled its members to hear more about the specific concerns school leaders have faced throughout the pandemic. In their responses, principals and vice-principals province-wide shared their unique vantage point, and their efforts to collectively create a safe and sustainable learning environment in Manitoba schools.

MTS is grateful for their feedback, and encourages all members to remain in touch with comments or concerns. Your voice is heard.

In no particular order, here are some of the comments our school leaders made in the COSL survey.



Some directives say I should implement “as best I can”. I don’t know what that means, given that I’m managing teacher stress and limited resources while maintaining student education.

Right now we are in survival mode, learning what is necessary when required. It would be great to know what schools are doing that is working. For example, in summer, how did schools prep for the start of the school year.

Lobby the school divisions for additional supports for small schools. All the extra support is going to the large schools and the small schools are being left out. We need kids in school. We know it is in their best interests, but to do it well and safely we need additional supports.

Please advocate on behalf of administrators who need consistent guidelines across the province, and for adequate funding from the province to cover the costs of needed staff, supplies, equipment and other resources. We need a clear and sensible plan.

Even though we are in the midst of a world-wide pandemic, the Education Review still looms over the heads of all stakeholders in education. It is difficult to construct a school plan when we are unsure of what next year will bring. We still want to lead our schools with a vision for improvement. Hard to do this with so much uncertainty.

I would like to see an inventory of actual extra work that is being required of principals, vice-principals and teachers... The expectation of immediate or almost immediate pivoting to remote learning has created tons of extra work for teachers and they are stressed and ready to crash.

Firstly, I love my job as a school principal. I wake up every morning excited about going to school. However, this past summer I feel that I as well as my colleagues were taken advantage of. As soon as the Minister announced that students would be back on September 8th, I worked every day with the vice-principal getting our school and classrooms ready for students and staff. I currently work anywhere from 14 to 18 hours a day.

I want COSL/MTS to advocate for centralized and consistent divisional/provincial guidance around COVID protocols. I want to continue to hope for a future where principal teachers continue to lead schools with local decision-making authority and community-based support. Centralized and standard approaches to challenges posed by COVID should not contribute to a more centralized approach to pedagogy.

We need to ensure that the government understands the contribution and sacrifice of teachers, principals and staff to ensure students are safe and cared for.

We need continued advocacy with the province specifically with respect to additional workload and reimbursement for unpaid time.\*

*\*COSL survey respondents averaged 19 unpaid workdays this summer preparing for students to return to school*



# COVID'S TOLL POLL

The annual province-wide membership survey, conducted by Viewpoints Research on behalf of The Manitoba Teachers' Society, polled 815 educators by phone in late October.

BY SAMANTHA TURENNE

In a year where we are dealing with the second pandemic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, (H1N1 was the first in 2009) it comes as no surprise that COVID-19 dominates teachers' concerns, cutting focus on other issues by half from pre-COVID research years.

The annual province-wide membership survey, conducted by Viewpoints Research on behalf of The Manitoba Teachers' Society, polled 815 educators by phone in late October about their experiences, concerns, challenges and perceptions of public education in Manitoba.

Members were asked to indicate their single biggest concern as a teacher today – 49 per cent pointed to COVID-19, understandably so. The coronavirus has added many complications to the education system, compounding existing issues, and both students and teachers are feeling its impact.

Nine in 10 members agree that most students are having some degree of difficulty re-adapting to school, while 13 per cent are having a lot of difficulty.

Gone are the days of sitting in a circle and reading a story, replaced by individual desks placed metres apart, handwashing stations and mask-

wearing students. Four in 10 members are spending several hours each day ensuring students are following COVID health and safety protocols, about half are spending up to an hour each day.

Members report that it is more likely that they can ensure mask wearing and hand-washing all of the time (each 70 per cent) than physical distancing (28 per cent). The inability to consistently achieve physical distancing is concerning since ensuring a physical distance of two-metres is a recognized best practice, and considered the most effective way of minimizing the spread of the coronavirus.

Two thirds of members said it is very challenging to ensure students practice physical distancing during the school day. Achieving the recommended two-metres of physical distance in classrooms is possible for 30 per cent of members, while half of members said one-metre of physical distancing is the most they can achieve. Twelve per cent of teachers are unable to achieve physical distancing in their classroom.

Despite the inability to effectively physically distance, eight in 10 members are comfortable with the health and safety precautions currently in place at

their school. However, 86 per cent are concerned about maintaining their own health through the year, with 37 per cent being very concerned.

The state of members' mental health and wellbeing is cause for concern, as 93 per cent of members report feeling stressed this school year. More than half (56 per cent) say they are very stressed. Students are struggling too. Two thirds of members are having difficulties dealing with students' emotional and social concerns further adding to the stress of teachers, since teachers are known to take on the stress of their students.

The Society's Disability Benefits Plan has already been seeing the effects of increased teacher stress with a reported 10-year high in the number of members taking medical leave. The demand for virtual counselling services from the Educator Assistant Plan has become overwhelming.

While it is uncommon to see so many teachers on medical leave and such elevated levels of stress this early in the school year, it is important to note that COVID-19 became a factor in March 2020.

In March, teachers were told to shift to remote learning, almost overnight, which meant adapting all their curricula to an online format, in addition to worrying about the health and safety of their own families.

This placed an unprecedented type of stress on teachers. Being back in the classroom has only increased the stress level, as teachers try to adapt to the new normal, while still reeling from the events this past spring. Six in 10 members (62 per cent) have found it challenging to re-establish connection and community in their classrooms.

With the uncertainty, crushing workloads, and confusion over expectations, inconsistent communication and concerns over maintaining personal health teachers are becoming less satisfied with their jobs.

Overall job satisfaction is at 78 per cent, while high, is lower than previous years. Dissatisfaction is at its highest (22 per cent). Half of dissatisfied members cited COVID-19 as a reason

though classroom diversity (45 per cent) and workload (39 per cent) were close behind.

Prolonged stress, coupled with fatigue and exhaustion means teachers are on course to experience record levels of burnout. Teachers are looking to the government for help, but so far, they have been disappointed with its response.

When asked about the provincial government's ability to effectively respond to COVID-19 in the public education system, almost half of teachers believe the Manitoba government is on the wrong track.

Conversely, more than eight in 10 (87 per cent) of respondents are confident in the Society's ability to advocate for public education and 70 per cent believe that MTS is doing a good job of representing their interests, 23 per cent said an excellent job.

Most educators (95 per cent) think MTS is a reliable source of information about education issues, while only 42 per cent trust the education minister, even fewer (24 per cent) consider the premier to be credible.

Despite the challenges and uncertainty brought on by COVID-19, one thing remains clear, the majority of teachers want to be in the classroom with their students. During COVID, half of members would prefer classroom teaching to teaching remotely (16 per cent) or a hybrid approach (32 per cent).

After COVID, that number rises to 92 per cent, with nine in 10 teachers favouring an in-class teaching environment. Not surprising, considering that almost two thirds (63 per cent) of members said they entered teaching because they enjoy working with children.

As COVID continues to push teachers into uncharted territory, they have been leaning heavily on their colleagues for support and guidance. Nine in 10 report that their colleagues have been supportive.

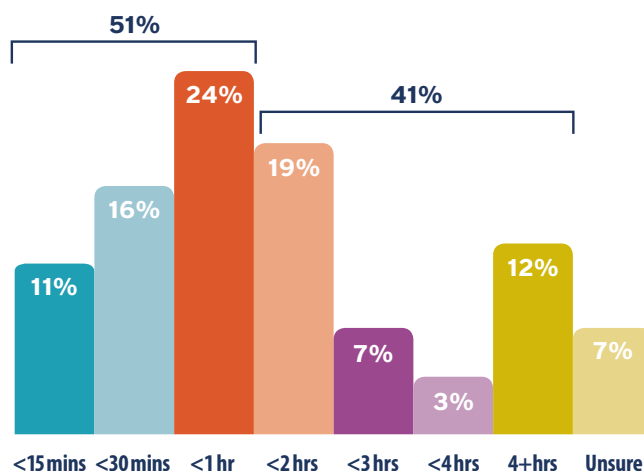
The margin of error for this poll is  $\pm 3.3$  per cent, 19 times out of 20.

**Two-metres of physical distance in classrooms is possible for 30 % of members, while half of members said one-metre is the most they can achieve. 12% of teachers are unable to achieve physical distancing in their classroom.**

**95% of educators think The Manitoba Teachers' Society is a reliable source of information about education issues, while only 42% trust the education minister, even fewer 24% consider the premier to be credible.**

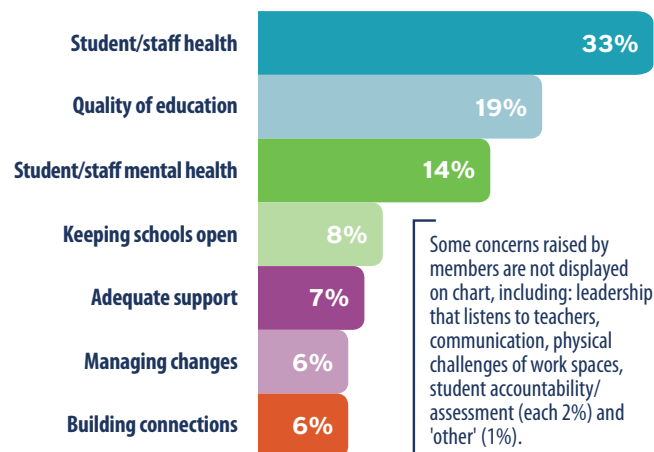
## COVID PROTOCOL TIME

**4 in 10 members are spending hours of each day ensuring students are following COVID protocols, about half are spending up to an hour/day.**



## CHALLENGES OF COVID

**Members' main concerns for this school year are student/staff health, quality of education and the mental well-being of students/staff**



# TEACHERS SPEAK OUT!

Teachers' Society leaders  
throw open the lines in  
telephone town hall



BY RAMAN JOB

Half of Manitoba teachers (52 per cent) who participated in last night's MTS telephone town hall said they had seriously considered retiring or changing professions because of the stresses and challenges of working in Manitoba's COVID environment.

Forty-eight per cent said they hadn't. MTS President James Bedford and Society General Secretary Danielle Fullan Kolton were on hand to directly answer members' questions. That question was one of three pitched to teachers during the hour-long online discussion.

But it was teachers' questions that mattered most.

They asked about everything from why federal funding for PPE hasn't been spent, and how the Society could help ease unreasonable workloads—to why teachers still don't have rapid testing, and where 100 teachers for the remote learning resource centre will come from.

Tara from Brandon talked about the many hats she wears as a high school teacher. "There has really not been any give and take in terms of things coming off our plate to create a healthier

**When asked about their single biggest concern as a teacher today, town hall participants were split between workload (35 per cent) and mental health (33 per cent). Physical health and COVID protocols weighed in at 16 and 12 per cent respectively.**

balance for us. Is there any indication of dialing back on certain duties?"

Bedford said the Society is advocating strongly at the table on many member issues and recognizes the incredible stresses teachers face. He mentioned success in advocating for mandatory masks, eliminating provincial exams in January, and advocating for changes to provincial report cards.

Vicki in Eriksdale asked about the lack of benefits and sick days for substitute teachers. Bedford talked about a plan in the works to secure sick days for subs. "This was one of the things we were able to reach agreement on with the Manitoba School Boards Association."

Fullan Kolton stressed the "long game" for public school teachers. She said that far from being ignored by the province, the Society has had at least 145 separate communications with government representatives. "That doesn't mean we've been walking hand-in-hand this whole time singing Kumbaya," she said. "There have been instances of disagreement and tension and stress and strain." She went on to enumerate successes.

Fullan Kolton said the Society was



disappointed with the announcement of the remote learning resource centre echoing the feelings of many teachers. “We have really turned our attention to the unreasonable workload for teachers,” she said.

Leslie from Elie asked whether extending the Christmas break would affect salaries or summer break. Catherine from Steinbach asked why she had to wait five days for the results of each of her four COVID tests. Cheryl, an itinerant resource teacher from Belmont, feared it’s not a matter of “if” but “when” she’ll be infected as she makes her rounds of seven schools.

Bedford and Fullan Kolton gave insights into each of these issues, sharing what communication had taken place with the Manitoba government and where the issues now stand.

When asked about their single biggest concern as a teacher today, town hall participants were split between workload (35 per cent) and mental health (33 per cent). Physical health and COVID protocols weighed in at 16 and 12 per cent respectively.

Fullan Kolton closed her remarks by saying the Society wants members to know that “we want to see improvements—and we can make your conditions better so you can be the best teacher that you can.”

Bedford stressed that teachers’ stories “are incredibly important so the public and our politicians understand at a much deeper level the commitment that our members have.”

At its peak, 2,175 teachers were listening to the town hall by phone while 1,687 others were tuned in to streaming audio on mbteach.org.

Members who didn’t get a chance to ask questions during the town hall left more than 200 voicemails. MTS will endeavour to answer them.

Bedford and Fullan Kolton said the town hall was a valuable initiative in that it was important to hear teachers’ voices. Political leaders and government education staff had been invited to listen.

The Society will consider undertaking another electronic town hall in the New Year.



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# Labour bill threatens rights

STORY BY SAMANTHA TURENNE

The provincial government has introduced two bills that will change the face of labour relations in Manitoba, for teachers and all union workers.

The first, Bill 16 – The Labour Relations Amendment Act, threatens the destruction of fairness, respect and equity in the labour relations process by stripping unions and workers of basic rights to organize and collective bargain.

For example, this bill lowers the threshold that would trigger a decertification vote, making it easier to decertify workplaces. It would also make it easier for employers to fire striking workers for misconduct.

The majority of clauses in Bill 16 would not affect Manitoba teachers or MTS, since teacher bargaining rights are part of the Public Schools Act.

One clause for concern however is this bill would give The Manitoba Labour Board greater power to remove members from a bargaining unit. MTS would oppose any action to alter the membership of The Society by removing principals, vice-principals, clinicians, etc. from the union.

This bill also imposes onerous financial rules for financial reporting and disclosure with which MTS would have to comply.

The second, Bill 45 – The Public Schools Amendment and MTS Amendment changes the way that teachers bargain. It moves teachers from the current system of local bargaining to a single-tier model of provincial bargaining.

The Society is supportive of provincial bargaining, and adopted the following bargaining principles into MTS policy at 2011 Provincial Council:

- Teachers remain governed under the Labour Relations Act;
- MTS will bargain directly with the Province of Manitoba (the funder);
- Bargaining must be fair and with an open scope;



**Two bills introduced in the Manitoba Legislature have the ability to change the face of labour relations in Manitoba, for teachers and all union workers.**

- The mechanisms for dispute resolution, whether strike or interest arbitration, must be without limitation;
- The best provisions from existing collective agreements should be the standard for the new contract; and
- The membership of MTS will remain, as it currently exists.

However, this bill incorporates the division's ability to pay into the arbitration process. This impedes the neutrality of an arbitration board. More troubling, this clause is reminiscent of legislation enacted in the 1990s, which undermined teacher collective bargaining.

A critical piece of a fair system of

bargaining is an open, unbiased, independent arbitration process. Since arbitration is the only dispute resolution process available to teachers, it is imperative that this process remains virtuous.

Bill 16 is modeled after previous legislation. Bill C-377 and C-525, two federal bills passed in 2014 by the Tories attacked unions and workers' rights, and were vehemently opposed by every union in the country. The Liberals repealed them in 2017.

At the time of writing Bills 16 and 45 are both at first reading.

# NEW YEAR, NEW PROGRAMS FOR FALL 2021



'Learn by doing' continues to be at the heart of the educational philosophy at Assiniboine College, with campuses in Brandon, Winnipeg and Dauphin. The college offers more than 50 certificate, diploma and post-graduate programs across a variety of disciplines connected to the labour market, so graduates are ready to step into careers with the confidence and skills to succeed.

New programs are introduced on a frequent basis at Assiniboine, ensuring students have educational pathways that connect them to in-demand occupations in Manitoba and beyond. So, what's new for next fall? High school students can now apply for three new, two-year diploma programs that focus on exciting careers in creative media: Media and Communications, Digital Art and Design, and Web and Interactive Development. Within all three programs, students will work with local industry on real-world projects.

In the Media and Communications program, students hone their communication skills and focus on creative storytelling, graduating with the training needed for careers in multiplatform journalism, television, radio or film.

Digital Art and Design is for the visual storyteller with an interest in creating art that serves a purpose. In this program, students learn the language of graphic design and gain an understanding of programming fundamentals, as well as audio/video production, to

build a foundation of skills and knowledge for today's world of multimedia communication.

In Web and Interactive Development, students learn how to merge technologies to create memorable user experiences, customizing the delivery of digital content. While learning the fundamentals of programming and mobile app development, students will develop creative solutions to deliver results.

Assiniboine College has also launched a new, eight-month Public Safety program with intakes every September and January in Brandon. This full-time program is designed to prepare graduates for a range of careers in the public safety sector, including municipal, regional and Indigenous police services, corrections and security.

This fall, students will be able to learn in an applied format, studying in a safe, on-campus environment. Assiniboine has provided, prospective students with a variety of ways to explore the college. Order a customized exploration guide, take a virtual campus tour and more at [assiniboine.net/experienceACC](https://assiniboine.net/experienceACC).

Free, 45-minute online information sessions are also on offer throughout the year, giving high school students an inside look at programs, financial aid and awards, athletics and more. Upcoming dates and times are available at [assiniboine.net/infosession](https://assiniboine.net/infosession).

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INCOME



**89%**  
STAY IN  
MANITOBA

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*\*Statistics taken from Assiniboine Community College's 2020 Graduate Satisfaction & Employment Survey.*

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'Twas THE Night  
Before New  
Years

PORTFOLIO



*'Twas the weeks before New Year when all through our land  
Parties of three had been summarily banned  
Our PPE hung by the chimney with care  
In hopes that a New Year would soon be there.*

*Memories of the past all danced in our heads  
A repeat, a promise of hope torn to shreds  
Mamma in her face mask tied to her cap  
Had just settled in for a long-distanced nap*

*When out in the street there arose such a clatter  
A message to all that Black Lives do Matter  
Just one of the issues we saw on the street  
With anti-maskers and vaxxers not nearly as sweet*

*The moon on the breast of the new melting snow  
A reminder of climate change still on the go  
When what to my wondering eyes should appear,  
More ghastly visions of a very bad year.*

*With a black-caped ogre, like a rusty old penny  
I knew in a moment it was two thousand twenty.  
More rapid than eagles, his dragons they came,  
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name.*

*Now, VIRUS! now, LOCKDOWN! now PLEXIGLASS and ZOOM  
On COVID! on CASES! on CORONA! and DOOM!  
To the top of your 'search' through summer and fall  
Slash away, slash away, slash away all.*

*The malls emptied out and bars (sometimes) too,  
Yellow, Orange or Red were the primary hue.  
Schools had new rules, every day it did seem,  
Leaving teachers the image of Munch's The Scream*

*Teach one class, no, two, go to online as well,  
Universities never taught us this circle of hell.  
Distance yourself, and your students, too,  
In a tiny classroom, you'll just have to make do.*

*Make do, they did, there on the frontline  
Still educating, protecting one kid at a time.  
Don't cough, don't sneeze, hands in the suds,  
You can't take sick time, we're right out of subs.*

*Classes too large? Just imagine them small,  
Plans and reality need not match at all.  
Imagination is a powerful tool  
With it you can make safe every last school*

*Teachers and principals swallowed their fear,  
Hoping against hope for a much brighter year.  
Staying positive has always been a good vow  
But being positive has such a new meaning now.*

*But the year, for sure, will soon disappear,  
When it's in the rear view, we'll all give a cheer.  
As the year fades in the brightening sky,  
We'll give it a first and second wave goodbye.*

*He'll shake his head, and to his team give a shout,  
Amazed a bit that we're sorting it out.  
And will join us to exclaim, as he drives out of sight,  
Happy New Year To All, Keep Up The Good Fight!*

**BY GEORGE STEPHENSON**

*WITH OUR YEARLY TIP OF THE HAT TO  
CLEMENT CLARKE MOORE, 1779-1863*

**"SANI CLAUS"**

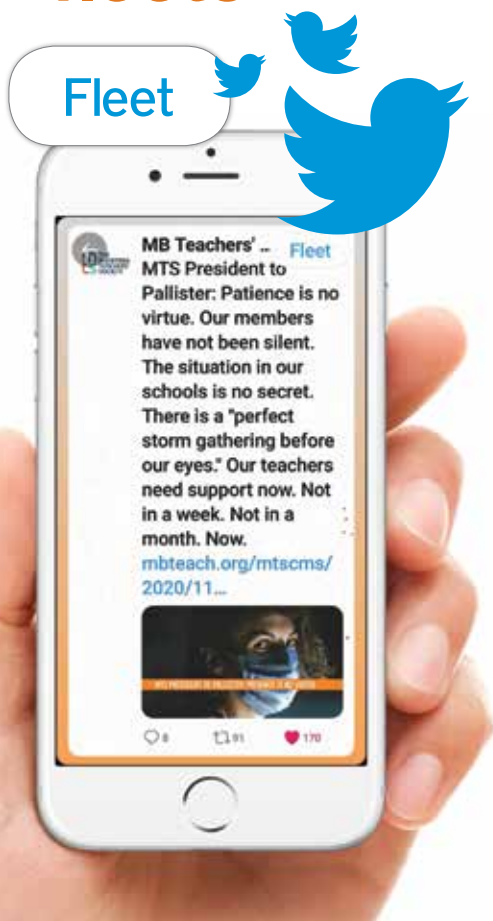
**ILLUSTRATED BY MATT KEHLER**

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?  
I'D LOVE TO HELP.  
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# REFRESH

BY RAMAN JOB, PUBLIC RELATIONS FACILITATOR

## SAME OLD STORY, NEW PLATFORM Twitter introduces 'fleets'



Okay, Twitter has launched a new feature that's creating some fresh buzz. After a dearth of major innovation for 10 years, "fleets"—essentially Twitter stories—rolled out to widespread confusion and even derision.

Confusion, because the concept for social media stories is far from new. It started with Snapchat back in 2012. Instagram stole the idea four years later and all but perfected it. Facebook then launched a much lamer version of stories which still struggles for attention. It also owns Instagram and doesn't want to outshine IG with story innovation.

Plus WhatsApp and LinkedIn are now working on their own copycat stories. Twitter is an extremely late adopter.

As for derision? Well, many hardcore Twitter users already loved the platform's highly political and cantankerous milieu and saw no need to soften or pretty it up.

"How many stories do we need to tell?" they ask.

But fleets are not about sucking more experienced social users into the vast Twitter funnel. Fleets are designed for the way to safely wade into the app.

Face it, Twitter is hard to love for many people. Especially if you're a new user. You have to work at growing a following of people that will actually pay attention and engage with you.

At first, you shout into the Twitter void. If someone eventually does notice one of your missteps or hot takes, it can attract more scrutiny than you'd ever dreamed. Add to that the fact that Twitter fights and misogyny are not uncommon. To survive professionally, you must always be on your best behavior and be on guard.

Some just avoid it, period.

Think back to any educational Twitter workshop you've attended. For every 24 people shown the ropes, perhaps four

will stick with it. But maybe fleets are the perfect bait to increase Twitter's user base.

The online bumbf says fleets are to "share personal in-the-moment thoughts with your followers free of public reactions. Your fleets disappear after 24 hours. They cannot be retweeted, liked, and are not open to public replies."

The only way to interact with fleets is by direct message (DM). If you have open DMs, anyone can react to your fleets. But if you lock up your messages (the default for new accounts) only people you follow can react to them. Sounds safe enough, right?

Except that anyone who's been around social for a while, knows that a simple shared screenshot can get anyone, including a teacher, in a white hot mess. Never, ever assume privacy. Twitter advanced search can resurrect nasty tidbits, as well.

So, will fleets be a comfortable onboard ramp for new Twitter users? I wouldn't count on it. Yes, it will be another tool for spreading messages, humanizing feeds, and perhaps become a diversion for a Twitiverse that's way too intense, way too often.

Who knows? Fleet bashers—who bellowed loudly in fleets on launch night—may come to enjoy the feature more than they thought. Doubtless, others will.

But more than likely, fleets will be just a soft blip in Twitter's evolution. They probably won't save the platform from an excess of discord and all caps MAGA tweets, or win over many people who are simply happier on Facebook and Instagram.

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