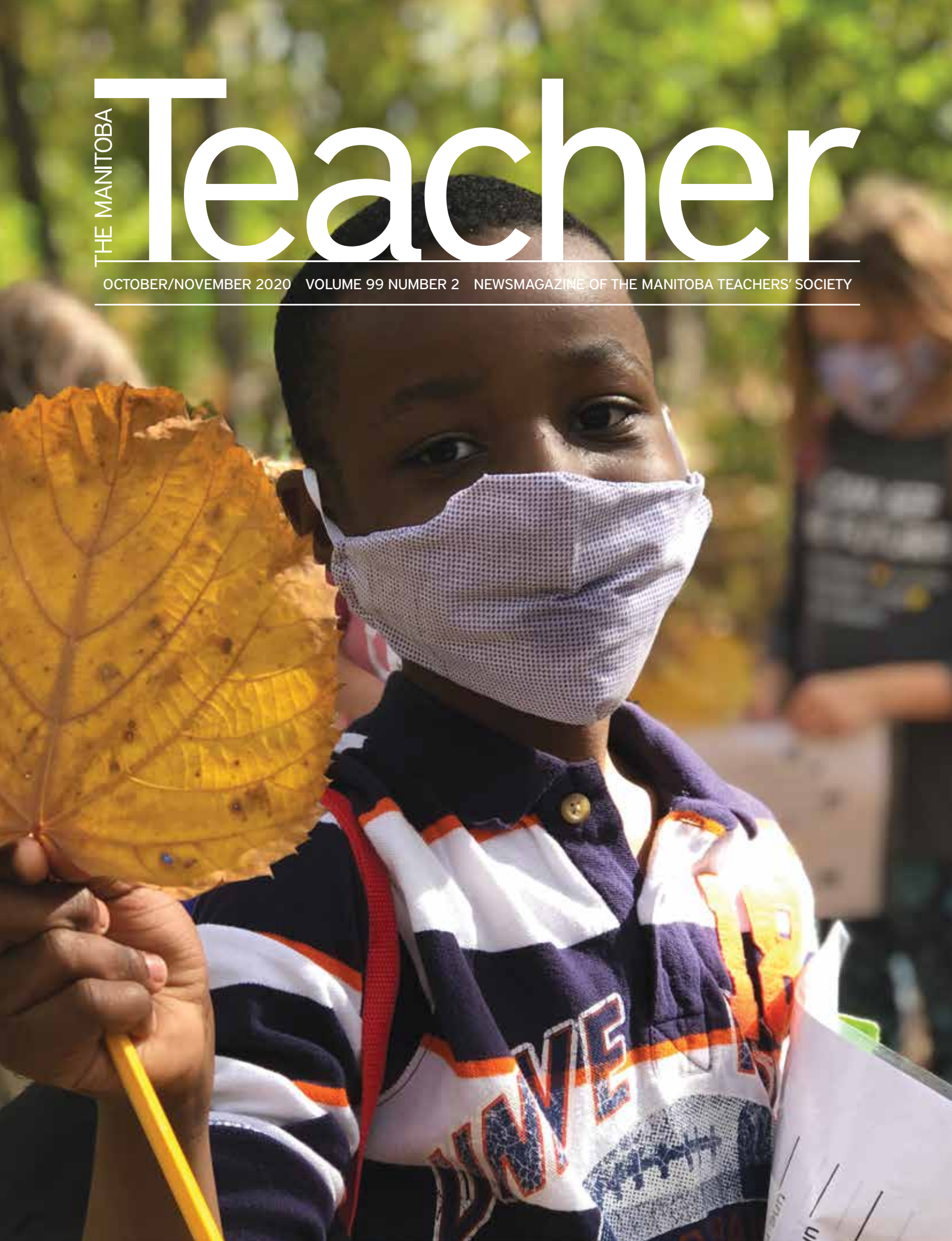


THE MANITOBA

Teacher

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2020 VOLUME 99 NUMBER 2 NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY



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

Phone: 204-831-3065/1-866-494-5747 (ext 232)

Fax: 204-831-3077/1-866-799-5784

Email: amichaluk@mbteach.org

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

Tuesday, October 27, 2020 | Tuesday, November 24, 2020 | Tuesday, December 15, 2020

Please email amichaluk@mbteach.org to register.

THE MANITOBA Teacher

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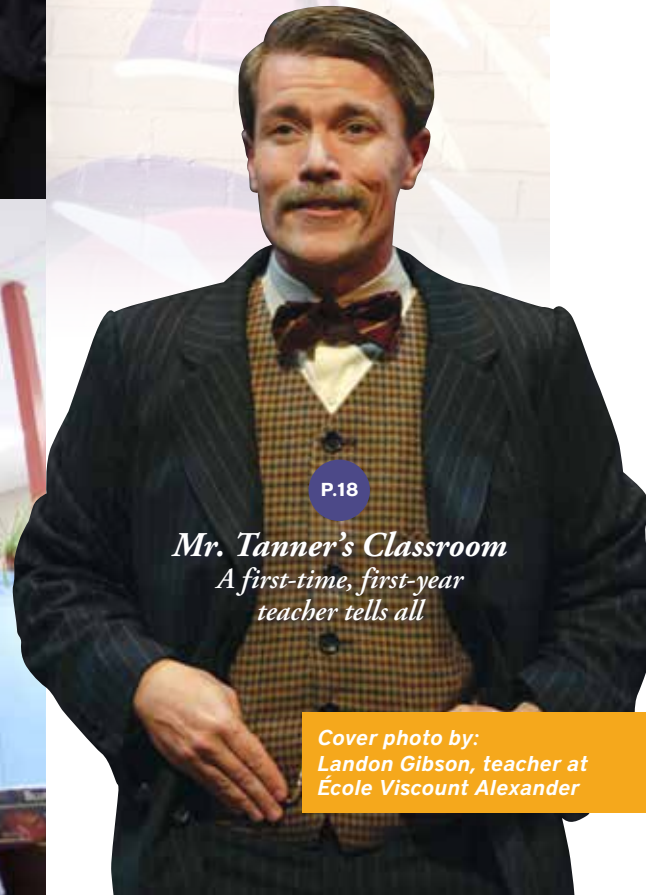
Organizers behind this year's event work tirelessly in hopes of recreating a similar experience online



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Inadequate funding and adapting to COVID health and safety protocols



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Mr. Tanner's Classroom

A first-time, first-year teacher tells all

Cover photo by:
Landon Gibson, teacher at
École Viscount Alexander



FROM THE PRESIDENT

JAMES BEDFORD

For every problem there is a solution, but every solution risks generating a new problem.

If there was a catch phrase for September, that would have been it.

We have seen much interpretation of the province's directives with respect to public education in our COVID-19 world, some of it very narrow and some very broad. Something that we are observing is that when a solution to a problem, say in achieving two metres of physical distancing, is put in place, it can have a dramatic impact on teacher workload. Conversely, not achieving that two metres of physical distancing can have a dramatic impact on teacher anxiety levels, not to mention trying to keep students one metre apart.

We achieved success in our push for mandatory face masks, but when that directive was challenged, we found ourselves participants in defending that directive in court. Again, another problem to solve, but thankfully the court ruling supported mandatory masks.

There are few easy solutions to the many problems that we face, but there is a process that we are learning valuable lessons from. In spring, when the pandemic first enveloped us, we found ourselves working in an environment that we had never been in before. We recognized the scope of the work to be done, but I think we struggled, like our members who were trying to determine how to teach remotely and students and parents who were trying to determine how to learn remotely, with exactly how to get the work done. In August, when we listened to our local presidents, it was clear that we had to improve our communications beyond what we achieved in spring.

In response, we added to our social media and website platforms. We are now meeting monthly (in virtual form) with local presidents and we are sending out all-member emails with greater frequency. We meet weekly with education partners and the deputy minister and continue to speak with the education minister regularly. Nationally, we meet with our colleagues through the Canadian Teachers' Federation every three weeks. Recently, we have met with the Retired Teachers' Association of Manitoba, committing to regular liaison meetings. And have initiated meetings with Liberal and NDP Education Critics.

We will not see an end to the problems that we must solve, nor do we have a pandemic playbook that gives us all the solutions. But, like our students, we are learning how to be better in our problem solving techniques and in our communications. And communications means both listening and speaking. That sounds a lot like good classroom practice. I will conclude by speaking to everyone; members, leaders and staff. Thank you for your hard work. We are not done by any means, but we are getting better at how we get that work done, and we never stop working on behalf of members.



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INSIDE MTS IN SEARCH OF AWESOME

DANIELLE FULLAN KOLTON, PH.D., GENERAL SECRETARY

I have procrastinated, written, and burned this article numerous times. Any attempt at encouragement, resilience coaching, or cheerleading seemed dumb. I rolled my *own* eyes at the absurdity of trying to console members 30 days into the start of a global pandemic school year. Assuring you that every little thing is gonna be OK is pure fiction when the first positive case of COVID showed up in Manitoba schools on week one.

My word count held steady at four for a long time because I had settled on a title without content: 'In Search of Awesome.' Truth be told, it was my second attempt after I deemed the title, 'Embrace the Suck' unsuitable for this publication.

The blinking cursor reminded me of a looming deadline, so I did what many resort to in times of indecision or paralysis: I cleaned my closet with a fervour that could hardly be rivaled. My entire desktop and electronic files were next. Then I ate chocolate chips from the bag while sitting in the pantry, and got captured in the black hole of Instagram fitness workouts for women who are almost 50.

I have much to show for this well-spent avoidance: a colour-organized closet that might last a week, a stunning computer file system in which I cannot find a thing, and limp arms from an over-zealous bicep workout. Apparently, Michelle Obama pipes are not attainable in one week.

It would be a real stretch to even whisper of the awesome in education these days; especially by way of its informal meaning as something extremely good or excellent. No, it is too soon to extol the virtues of 2020. Searching for that awesome is surely misguided.

Yet, I remained infatuated with the word, awesome, probably because by its strict definition, it means extremely impressive or *daunting*; inspiring great admiration, apprehension, or fear. This loaded word aptly captures all its contradictions. It recognizes that the impressive work of teachers and school leaders is very worthy of admiration but shadowed by apprehension, uncertainty, and anxiety. In that sense, I don't have to search far to find awesome,

because our 16,000 members are living it every single day.

We hear from you frequently in many forms and have responded to more than 800 member inquiries through email or social media platforms. By Sept. 9 alone, staff and Local presidents had fielded over 2,300 telephone calls! Very soon, our member poll will engage 900 members. Close to 6,000 MTS members participated in the Manitoba Teacher Engagement survey and Canadian Teachers' Federation survey – this is an unprecedented response level! Staff officers and the senior management team receive daily information through the various channels of Local presidents, COSL leadership team, COSL directors, EFM executive, SAGE council, and members involved in the many committees and teams of the Society.

Our all-member emails, titled *The Manitoba Sub*, continue to be an important communication channel delivered directly to your inbox. The title is a play on the word "substitute" as an interim communication between issues of *The Manitoba Teacher* publication. Our most recent mail-out was successfully delivered to 15,144 active members and opened by 12,431! Please ensure that your MyProfile account is up-to-date with your preferred personal email address.

Through all these networks, we assemble information that directly informs our strategic advocacy with education partners. Your experiences drive our work in protecting welfare and professional status. Your health and safety is paramount, and we will remain relentless in our fight for your right to a safe place to work. Most recently, this has fueled our calls for two-metres of physical distance and government leadership on consistent criteria for mask exceptions.

Our focus right now is on workload. We are seeing it intensify among teachers and principals who are being asked to take on an unrealistic variety of tasks and roles. This is not OK. It impacts the well-being of teachers and school leaders and compromises attention to students. In this untenable situation, relationships suffer,



mental health suffers, and ultimately, the entire system suffers.

All evidence points to the fact that the global pandemic will be one of, if not the most, prevalent long-term effect on health well into the future. We are already seeing this impact on our members, and we must respond.

All of this to say that it is perfectly OK not to be OK. There is no way to 'silver-lining' the situation. Tell us what you need. Stay connected to your Local. **Use Your Voice.**

Most especially, be assured that we remain resolutely committed to protecting your awesome.

Use Your Voice

We need your voice in a teacher mental health check-in survey being conducted by the Canadian Teachers' Federation from October 17-25, 2020. Watch your inbox for a link to this survey, and please speak out. This will provide critical data for our action on your behalf.



ON THE FRONTLINE

BY LINDSEY ENNS

School staff and students stepped into a land of many unknowns this school year and some teachers say getting a handle on how to navigate COVID-19 in the classroom has been both challenging and chaotic at times.

"It's sink or swim right now," one high school teacher said. "I feel like I'm just staying afloat and if you add one more thing to my pile I might drown."

With the first few days of school behind them, The Teacher spoke with Manitoba teachers about what they are experiencing in their classrooms and how they are handling the school year so far. We have chosen not to use their names or the names of their schools to allow them to speak freely.

The return has not been without anxiety.

More than 20 schools in Manitoba have had a COVID-19 case since classes resumed Sept. 8. The largest outbreak in the province so far was reported at John Pritchard School, with at least 38 cases. The K-8 school in North Kildonan was forced to switch more than 250 students to remote learning during the second week of school.

A colony school teacher says she feels like

the last several months have been "like a rollercoaster" for teachers.

"I am not able to be the kind of teacher I've grown to become or loved to become," she said. "I'm sure this is the way a lot of teachers, if not all of them, feel right now."

Their school was originally preparing for remote learning following a surge in COVID-19 cases near their community, but then a day before school started they were told to prepare for in-class learning.

"Everything was so up in the air ... a lot of unknowns and lot of questions that needed and still need clarifying."

Students have already been staying home sick, she said, which has been worrisome.

"That created our whole worry and panic our first week in," she said. "It's definitely an anxious time. It's different this year, stress levels are high."

Two high school teachers said being able to have smaller class sizes has helped alleviate some of their stress, but balancing both in-class and remote instruction has been difficult.

"I'm finding it does very much feel like I'm doing double the work," one teacher said.

Another high school teacher said although

she doesn't feel nervous in her own classroom, she worries about her husband's safety, who is an elementary school teacher.

"The number of exposures my husband has in a day is coming home to me," she said. "That is much more my worry than my own classroom and my own school."

She added a lot of students are far behind and are "missing key things" following weeks of online learning. She's also noticed a heightened level of anxiety among teachers and students this year.

"I have kids who are really anxious about being here," she said, adding she has been encouraging teachers to speak out when they are feeling unsafe.

One high school teacher said her and her husband made the difficult decision to not send their two young children to school this year because they are worried about their health and safety.

"And that speaks volumes because I'm a public school educator," she said.

She said she feels safe teaching at a high school where the students are wearing masks and there's room for physical distancing but that just isn't the reality in elementary schools across the province.

But she admits homeschooling hasn't been an easy transition.

"It's a lot, I'm not going to lie. I teach during the days and the evenings now."

Collaborating with other teachers and building relationships with new students also hasn't been easy.

"It's a lot harder because we have to maintain that distance," she said. "So that's something we're trying to navigate."

Another teacher, like many others, said she had to make changes to her classroom to create more space for physical distancing.

"It's kind of heart breaking if you look at my classroom because I had to take out all the books and all the things that make my classroom look homey," she said. "It's pretty sterile in here."

The Louis Riel School Division says they have successfully redesigned spaces in their schools to achieve two metres of physical distancing for all students and staff. But for some teachers and educational assistants, that has meant teaching students in two or three different rooms at a time. One teacher described the situation as, "prepping to teach full time and prepping for a sub for the very same day, everyday."

School staff are also adjusting to cleaning and disinfecting more frequently as well as wearing a mask while teaching. Manitoba guidelines require facemasks for students in Grades 4 to 12 as well as in any Grades 3-4 split classrooms where physical distancing can't be maintained.

One teacher said wearing a mask all day has changed her teaching style and has already caused her to lose her voice. Another teacher said her mask gets moist often from speaking and she sometimes experiences difficulty breathing. Another said teachers at her school have been using microphone and speaker systems in their classrooms and her teaching style has stayed "exactly the same."

The colony school teacher says she encourages teachers to make time for down time, as difficult as it might seem right now.

"Go for a walk, do things to help you cope, help you relax," she said, adding she enjoys riding her horse and spending time outside with her family. "Right now doing things like that outside helps to balance things out a little better."

Finding a way

Despite all of the challenges teachers are facing in the classroom, they are also finding new ways to deliver their lessons, whether it's online, in their classrooms or outdoors.

Schools in the Pembina Trails School Division have had outdoor music and phys-



"I am not able to be the kind of teacher I've grown to become or loved to become. I'm sure this is the way a lot of teachers, if not all of them, feel right now."

- Colony school teacher

ed classes while many other schools across the province have been creating their own outdoor learning spaces.

"Our senior admin team visited over half of our schools this morning," Pembina Trails Supt. Ted Fransen posted on Twitter on Sept. 8. "We found scenes of joy, celebration, distancing, preparedness, a sense of calm and peacefulness, sprinkled with some worry. Thank you staff for keeping our students safe and your warmth and care!"

One Winnipeg School Division (WSD) teacher posted on Twitter that instead of making rules for her students to follow, her and her students created a Medicine Wheel to express what they think their minds, hearts, spirits and bodies should feel like in a healthy classroom.

Amid the WSD's bus driver strike in September, Art City invited Mulvey School students on a "walking school bus" that takes children to an after-school art program. After school each day, students are invited to go to a park near the organization's downtown location. They plan to move the program indoors as it gets colder.

Mixed feelings among Yukon teachers

Yukon students returned to schools before any others in Canada and Ted Hupe, president of the Yukon Teachers' Association said the overall feeling among their membership is "wide and varied."

"Some staff are anxious that when COVID does hit the Yukon there will be nothing to really stop it or control it in the schools,"

Hupe said. "The biggest thing is that physical distancing is practically impossible in most schools."

Hupe said school principals have been doing most of the heavy lifting from creating operational plans to putting up signage. Little training has also taken place and some feel the school reopenings were rushed. Suppliers are concerned about the potential of running out of cleaning supplies soon. They also don't have enough substitute teachers on hand.

"If we are to keep everyone safe by staying home even if we get slightly sick, we will be hit hard this fall with the lack of humans in front of students," Hupe said.

Elijah Smith Elementary School in Whitehorse was among one of the first schools to open in the country on Aug. 20.

"It's been pretty smooth so far," the school's principal Jeff Cressman said regarding the reopening.

Yukon had no active cases of COVID-19, as of Sept. 25.

Despite being able to have smaller class sizes, Cressman says proper social distancing is a challenge in any school.

"You're never going to keep students, especially in elementary school, six feet apart 24/7," he said, "If we're expecting to do that we're not living in reality."

Cressman said he's hoping they will be able to get through the school year without having to stop face-to-face learning.

"As long as we keep the kids in mind through all this we're not going to make a mistake."

YOUR VOICES, HEARD

Over the past months, members have reached out to The Society through phone calls, emails, letters and social media voicing concerns about a number of COVID-19 related topics. Concerns about class size, personal protective equipment, sick time, mental health supports and workload represent just a smattering of the more than 800 questions we have received and responded to.

Through these interactions, you provide valuable and insightful information about the realities in the classrooms – you are the frontline of education. The teacher voice is a powerful component as we continue to work behind the scenes with government and education stakeholders to ensure that the return to in-class learning is safe and sustainable.

Please continue to reach out with your questions and concerns. We are here to help.

In no particular order, here are some of the comments and questions we have received from across the province. These comments have been edited for length, grammar and punctuation. All identifying information has been removed to protect privacy.



Some divisions have created smaller class sizes, bought their teachers dividers, protection shields and outdoor classroom supports. My division has done nothing other than provide masks, which I have not seen. They have said no to new furniture, dividers and hand sanitizer in classrooms. There should be consistency between divisions.

Students in Grades 4-12 are required to wear masks. The government has mandated that all students, K-12, have to wear masks on school buses. It does not make sense that K-3 does not have to wear masks in school. My safety is jeopardized by poor inconsistent policy.

If teachers are forced to take days without pay due to illness or isolation, as mandated by public health, there is the possibility that some will decide to hide their symptoms in order to make sure they have enough money to get by. Paid sick leave should be provided, especially when we are talking about mitigating the risk factors.

The mental health wellbeing of teachers during this pandemic is very important. I am wondering if there will be other services available to teachers for mental health support such as an online support group/chat with others or access to other counsellors if unable to get into EAP counsellor right away. Teachers cannot be effective if they are not doing well mental health wise.

I am apprehensive about going into my classroom where I can barely give my 23 students a metre apart and where the assumption seems to be that they will all somehow immediately and consistently comply with all health and safety directives, without question. I feel extremely unsettled and anxious about my students' and my own safety.

What can MTS do to enforce keeping families accountable to isolate sick kids? Sick kids are returning to class the next day after being sent home with sore throat and fevers. We are being told that there is nothing we can do if there are no visible symptoms.

I am concerned about the quality of education we can provide in an elementary classroom when we are told to remove our reading corners, math manipulatives, books shelves, etc. in order to add more tables and desk to accommodate one-metre distance. Would a carpenter be told to do his/her job with no hammers, nails, drills? We are being asked to do our job without the tools necessary to provide a quality product.

Schools need to be held to a higher standard during these unprecedented times. Schools should be monitored and inspected to ensure they are safe for employees and students. Why are schools and divisions not being held accountable for the lack of resources and efforts to implement physical distancing, reallocation of workspaces, and protective equipment (plexiglass, increased hand sanitizer stations, access to windows and/or fresh air in the classroom etc.)?

Whose job is it to sanitize desks and our classrooms?

We are too understaffed to allow for social distancing of two-metres between students. We can barely accomplish one-metre.

Museum launches **virtual field trips**

BY LINDSEY ENNS

Manitoba Museum is inviting schools to explore Manitoba's history, nature and science from the comfort of their classroom or home thanks to their new slate of virtual field trips.

"We're trying to really incorporate that feeling of you being here walking through the museum with us," said Rachel Erickson, the museum's head of learning and engagement.

Their virtual field trips give teachers and students a chance to explore the museum via a live and interactive presentation led by the museum's expert guides. These new virtual curriculum-connected programs also engage students in different ways by featuring polls and charts, up-close examinations of real museum artifacts, specimens and exhibits along with live streamed tours of the museum galleries or the Planetarium's night sky. They are also

able to offer a blended learning experience so students can log in both from the classroom or from home at the same time.

Erickson said they usually have around 80,000 students visit the museum's three venues each year so they knew they had to make some adjustments to reach the realities of today's classrooms. Their virtual field trips, which are broken up into 14 themes for various grade levels, include resources for both before and after the presentation.

The museum is also continuing to offer on-site guided and self-guided school visits. Erickson said they have been splitting students up into groups of 10 or less and adjustments have been made to their on-site experiences for the health and well-being of their visitors.

Those interested in more information about their virtual field trips or on-site tours can contact the museum's



reservations coordinator via email at programs@manitobamuseum.ca or by calling 204-988-0626. The museum can also be found online by visiting, manitobamuseum.ca.

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BY SAMANTHA TURENNE
& LINDSEY ENNS

FOOD CHALLENGES

The biggest challenge faced by school food programs is inadequate funding. These days, the struggle of stretching pennies to buy that extra box of Cheerios is further compounded by the need to restructure and adapt food programs to meet the health and safety requirements set out by Manitoba's Public Health Office.

Along with following social distancing requirements and specific cleaning and sanitizing procedures, schools now have to consider things like personal protective equipment for staff or volunteers involved in food preparation and serving, where food items will be prepared, how to deliver food to students in a world where family-style serving is no longer an option.

"Our concern is that the nutritional quality of the foods offered may be compromised due to all the other factors that need to be considered to keep staff and students safe," said Clara Birnie, program dietitian with the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba. "Our hope is that the resources that we have prepared along with the supports we will offer during the school year will help schools to confidently serve nutritious foods, while following all other safety protocols."

Under the COVID-19 regulations, students are not permitted to be involved in the preparation of food for nutrition



programs. This single requirement has had the greatest impact on the HIVE breakfast program at Faraday School – a student initiated program, which up until March 2020, was run by volunteers from the Student Voice program.

"The students would meet every Tuesday at noon to set the menu, they also made the grocery list," said Kim Reimer, teacher and program volunteer. "They prepared and served the food. They learned about cost effective ways of making nutritious food. They even loaded the dishwasher at the end of the day."

Since September, guidance counsellor Carol Hoydalo has been the designated grocery shopper, spending a few hours every Sunday sourcing the ingredients for the upcoming week's menu. Gone are the days of French toast, scrambled eggs and fruit compote – the hot meals, one of the biggest draws of the meal program, has been replaced by paper bags filled with fruit, hard-boiled eggs and items yet to be determined.

"We are trying things out. We can't buy a block of cheese and serve slices on a plate anymore. What are the options for pancakes? We have a recipe for a pancake stick, but what about the syrup? How do we package that," said Hoydalo.

An added challenge - the school's kitchen is under renovation. The HIVE volunteers have been cooking at home and transporting the pre-packaged bags to school.

"I feel silly wearing a mask and gloves in

my kitchen at home, but it's what I have to do to make sure the muffins are complying with the COVID requirements," said Hoydalo.

The need to individually package items has been another issue, not only complicating the food delivery process, but also adding to costs as well as environmental impact.

"Our hope is that the resources that we have prepared along with the supports we will offer during the school year will help schools to confidently serve nutritious foods, while following all other safety protocols."

*- Clara Birnie, program dietitian
Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba*

"With the brown paper bags, there is the issue of freshness and sometimes the bags get stained," said Hoydalo. "I switched to the plastic bags, but after one week it was just killing me. It is not good for the environment. I can't do that. I switched back to paper."

The ability for students to socialize has also been affected.

"Some of our kids come in just to socialize," said Catherine Salter, teacher and HIVE volunteer. "A lot of these kids were on the outside, and through this program they came to the inside. They gained confidence. Sometimes teachers would eat with the students. We have even had parents come for breakfast. There is a community aspect that is missing and trying to take that back is a real struggle."

The loss of community is something that resonates with Mark Lucas, principal at Many Faces Education Centre in Flin Flon, Man.

"We operate our school under family values and one of the biggest things about family is the ability to eat together," he said. "We did that every day pre-COVID and what came out of it was magical. Students were more engaged. They felt comfortable. They talked openly. As teachers, we could share a bit of our lives, and it broke down barriers. Our students saw us on more of a level playing field."

Lucas said that student engagement is a crucial component when looking at ways to continue their nutrition program, and his team has a plan.

"We're going to create a cooking show. As staff, we will all take turns producing something. Going live is our hope," he said. "The kids can laugh at us and hopefully cook along with us."

Lucas is also noticing an increase in cost,



as he makes the shift from family-style meals to individual “grab and go” bags.

“The cost is higher, but for much less food,” he said. “Once we get the hang of this, we’re hoping to do some bigger lunch items which will probably come at a lower cost since we’re going to be cooking it from scratch.”

The disparity in food prices across Manitoba, as well as access to fresh goods becomes even more apparent when schools can no longer buy and cook in bulk to supply their nutrition programs.

While Lucas, in the northern part of the province, has already noticed an increase in costs, Debbie Lenhardt Mair, principal at Sister MacNamara School reports that apart from the increase in time required to individually package food items, there has been no effect on the actual cost of food, to date.

“We really want to make sure students have access to a variety of fresh produce because it’s not always available locally to our families,” said Mair.

Before COVID, students were able to grab fruit on their own but now teachers serve them with tongs. The menu has also changed to include more hardy fruit like oranges, bananas, apples and pears instead of strawberries and grapes

Mair said that even though the program looks different, food and snacks are an extremely important of student learning at Sister MacNamara and the team is committed to ensuring its continuation.

“It’s a little more work, there’s no doubt

about that, but everyone is pitching in to make it work,” she said.

Mikaela Domish, a resource teacher at Chief Peguis Middle School, has also made some major changes to that school’s program to ensure COVID compliance.

Pre-Covid, students across all grades, sometimes as many as 20, would meet in

“The cost is higher, but for much less food. Once we get the hang of this, we’re hoping to do some bigger lunch items which will probably come at a lower cost since we’re going to be cooking it from scratch.”

*- Mark Lucas, principal
Many Faces Education Centre*

the resource room for breakfast and lunch. This year, students are no longer allowed to come into the room – the mixing of cohorts is not permitted. Breakfast and snack bins, filled with things like fresh fruit, applesauce and Ziploc baggies of cereal, are now placed in each classroom, replacing toast and eggs

“The kids have access to the snack bins all day, every day as long as they ask the teacher if it’s OK to grab something,” said Domish. “Teachers refer kids for lunch. Students are now responsible for asking their teachers if they need lunch. Then, I deliver the lunches to the classrooms.”

With the new rules, Domish was concerned that students would be hesitant to ask for lunch.


“Last year, it was much more discreet because kids could just come in and grab something if they were hungry. Discretion is so important for those that are nervous about using the program,” she said. “We try very hard to reduce that stigma of lunch programs. There is no need for stigmas. If you forget your lunch, we have a lunch for you.”

To help alleviate the stigma, Domish gave a presentation about lunch programs to each classroom.

“I invited them to please use the program,” she said. “I have the food; I have the groceries. I told them I would much rather give it to them than have it end up in the compost.”

Domish said that since she did the presentations, she has already seen an increase in the number of students accessing the program.

“I am optimistic that it will stay that way because I know that the need is there,” she said. “I like to keep the menu fresh. I feel like if the food is really good then the stigma kind of goes away because it’s like having a treat.”



BY LINDSEY ENNS

SAGEs scramble to plan MTS PD Day

The Society's annual professional development day has always been a time for thousands of teachers to come together, collaborate, get inspired and learn. So organizers behind this year's event have been working tirelessly behind the scenes in hopes of recreating that same experience online.

The Society's Provincial Executive made the decision at the end of June to proceed with MTS PD Day. The executive met after discussing the day with Special Area Groups of Educators (SAGE) presidents. The motion adopted by the executive was that "the format of MTS PD 2020 shall be online with the option for in-person SAGE meetings where circumstances allow."

In order to comply with public health orders, all events were moved online. This year's newest SAGE is the Manitoba Teachers for Students with Learning Disabilities (MTSLD).

As of Oct. 8, a total of 12 SAGEs announced they were forced to cancel their events this year. One of these groups has already published a catalogue of workshops on their website that will be available throughout the year and are using the UnionWare system for registration.

Kevin Lopuck, president of the Manitoba Social Science Teachers' Association (MSSTA), the only SAGE

hosting a virtual national conference this year, says planning an event of this magnitude amid a worldwide pandemic meant a lot of their meetings took place via video chat.

"It's been really tough in that sense ... our team works really, really well at planning our PD Day, we've been doing it for a long time," Lopuck said. "We will have a wide variety of sessions from educators themselves and interested parties."

MSSTA is partnering with the Association for Canadian Studies, Ontario History and Social Science Teachers' Association and Association québécoise pour l'enseignement de l'univers social to host their "Teaching History & Social Studies in the time of COVID-19" conference. Lopuck added as long as teachers register for PD Day they will have access to this virtual national conference for up to 90 days afterwards.

Brian McMillan, president of the Physical and Health Educators of Manitoba (PHE MB), says their team has been working hard to provide a seamless virtual event.

"The MTS presentation regarding the logistics of various platforms was helpful and allowed our planning committee to research and choose the best option for PHE Manitoba," McMillan said. "Extensive

communication with presenters was required to determine whether presenters could present in a virtual format."

Despite having to move to an online format, they are still able to offer six time slots with five to six options per time slot, he added. They are also offering regular and delayed registration options this year. A regular registration will allow participants to virtually attend sessions the day of and the delayed will give them access to these virtual lessons the week after PD Day and until Nov. 23.

"We are able to provide a variety of sessions on physical education and health education topics, some of which are theory based and some of which are activity based," he said.

Judy Giesbrecht, the Manitoba Music Educators' Association's (MMEA) conference chairperson, said since January they were planning for a face-to-face conference as they had in previous years until COVID-19 hit. Since they were forced to move online this year, they are planning to host six streams, with each stream consisting of four sessions.

"This conference is the result of the hard work and dedication of many people," Giesbrecht said. "It would not have happened without the support of the MMEA board and my Tempo committee."

"It is our hope that this virtual conference will provide them with the opportunity to grow in their craft and be inspired and energized as music educators during these very different and difficult times."

Giesbrecht said there are some exceptional presenters of international caliber lined up for this year's conference.

Kyle Melia, president of L'Association manitobaine des professeurs de français - Manitoba Association of Teachers of French (MATF-AMPF), said they are also hosting an online conference this year. They had already started presenter recruitment and had several educators from around the province interested in taking part before they decided to make the switch to online, Melia said.

"Executive members spoke with each of the presenters and surveyed them on how they would feel most comfortable presenting online and what support they would need to convert their session to be just as engaging online," Melia added.

Based on feedback from their membership, MATF is offering sessions that will help teachers facilitate second language learning in today's classroom.

"Our sessions are highlighting free online digital resources for teachers and students access to enhance remote learning opportunities, best practices for engaging activities to promote oral communication in the classroom while maintaining social distancing and how to ensure we embed Indigenous perspectives in French Communication and Culture," he said. "We have heard from several of our members that their teaching responsibilities have been changed temporarily for the school year to help with physical distancing and therefore, we are also offering sessions that promote cross-curricular integration of topics in French Communication and Culture to ensure we support generalist classroom teachers and specialists."

Melia said they are currently working

on a password protection section of their website so members can access online sessions held on MTS PD Day as well as links to digital resources and shared documents from the presenters to support teaching strategies throughout the year.

Other PD Day sessions include Teaching ELA in Challenging Times, Teaching and Learning During a Pandemic: Opportunities, Reflections and Provocations as well as Helping Students with their Anxieties and Maintaining Healthy Behaviours with Students and much more. Dr. Jody Carrington is also giving a keynote on "Relationships and Connection in the Time of COVID: Why Our Students Need Us Now More Than Ever" as part of the Manitoba Association of School Social Workers (MASSW) conference. For more information about all of these sessions and more or to register, visit <http://www.mbteach.org/mtscms/2020/02/26/mts-pd-day-oct-23-2020/>.

Even more challenges for organizers

Although MTS PD Day is going ahead this year, not every teacher is being given the opportunity to participate, which has only created even more challenges for organizers.

While some school divisions are encouraging their teachers to take part in PD Day on Friday, Oct. 23 by recognizing it as a non-instructional day, that's not the case in several divisions across the province.

Teachers in Beautiful Plains, Border Land, Hanover, Garden Valley, Western, St. James-Assiniboia, Winnipeg and Pembina Trails school divisions were asked to apply to take part in this year's PD Day as it's being recognized as an instructional day.

Kyle Melia, president of L'Association manitobaine des professeurs de français - Manitoba Association of Teachers of French (MATF-AMPF), said their "greatest challenge" in recent weeks has been the announcements of school divisions that will not be participating this year.

"This has resulted in the loss of several presenters from our program as they are unable to attend the day," Melia said. "Several of our MATF executive members will also be unable to help facilitate the day due to their divisional expectations and this has left the few remaining available MATF executive with extra responsibilities on top of their usual portfolio to facilitate MTS PD Day."

In the Border Land and Hanover school divisions, teachers could apply to attend PD Day, contingent upon availability of substitute teachers. Teachers in the Seven Oaks School Division are being given "discretionary PD days," meaning some schools may choose to use Oct. 23 as a PD day and allow teachers to attend conferences that day. K-8 schools may bank school-based PD days as an administration day.

Kevin Lopuck, president of the Manitoba Social Science Teachers' Association (MSSTA), said he wanted to thank MTS for keeping the focus on the importance of this PD Day for teachers.

"Not all the divisions are mandating the day of MTS PD Day ... so that's frustrating," Lopuck said.

MTS President James Bedford indicated to the education minister just how valuable this PD Day is for teachers.

"We have a rich history of working with superintendents from across the province, which has benefitted teachers and students alike," he said in a letter to superintendents earlier this year. "We are committed to working purposefully with superintendents to provide voice and choice for teachers."

Bedford asked that they be counted on to "honour our long history of universal participation."

"Thanks to our outstanding SAGE leaders who have worked so hard to offer these important professional development opportunities for teachers this year," he added.

Thank You

For early mornings and late nights
FOR MAKING SAFE SPACES
For coaching and consoling
FOR SHINING A LIGHT
For strength, creativity, and love
FOR FINDING A WAY
For leading and learning
FOR BEING OUR TEACHERS

October 5, 2020, is World Teachers' Day. Held annually since 1994, it commemorates the anniversary of the adoption of the 1966 UNESCO recommendation regarding the status of teachers. The recommendation established benchmarks regarding teacher education, recruitment, employment and working conditions. This year, the World Teachers' Day theme is *"Teachers: Leading in crisis, reimagining the future"*.

In Manitoba, we have watched in awe throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as MTS members strove to maintain valuable connections with students while delivering meaningful, inventive learning opportunities. They used the tools at their disposal and invented a few new ones, too. Their work, more a calling than a job, has never been more important or more rooted in equal parts dedication and love.

This message, created in-house by the MTS Communications team, appeared in print and digital ads in the Winnipeg Free Press, Manitoba's rural weekly newspapers, The Brandon Sun and ChrisD.ca to mark World Teachers' Day. Radio and television interviews with MTS President James Bedford, as well as teachers from across the province, rounded out the day.

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BY ANNE BENNETT

IT'S A FIRST

John Wilkes Booth in *Assassins*
(Dry Cold Productions)



Ralph Sheldrake in *White Christmas*
(RMTC)

In 2017, after 30 films, 50 plays and hundreds of radio spots, Gordon Tanner shifted career gears. A fixture on the Manitoba theatre and film production scenes for more than two decades, in 2017 he enrolled in the After Degree Program with the Faculty of Education at Brandon University. This September he took his place in front of a brand new audience, a Grade 1 class at Winnipeg's École Lansdowne School, a place he calls a "gem".

"Some days it feels like a seven-hour one-man improv show where all the suggestions come from six-year-olds" he laughs. "I guess the biggest difference is that in this particular show I have 23 audiences of one with whom I am building an interactive, immersive, hopefully educational live theatre experience, in which each of them is the star and I am the supporting actor. We're hoping for almost 200 episodes this season."

Born and raised in Winnipeg, 52-year-old Tanner attended the University of Manitoba out of high school, obtaining a degree in mechanical engineering. His career track was short-circuited, though, by a chance visit to the campus' Black Hole Theatre Company. There he discovered and nurtured a love of performing that led to the footlights of theatres across Canada, including the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre. On television he has portrayed the likes of former Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien.

"I also worked for a couple years for the provincial government in the Department of Children and Youth Opportunities. I saw firsthand how important it is to have really positive interactions in the early years."

When Tanner and his partner, Ardith Boxall, artistic director at Theatre Projects Manitoba, decided he would pursue a career in education, the University of Winnipeg had closed registrations for its After Degree Program, but Brandon University had extended theirs.

"So we sold our house, got two apartments and put a lot of miles on the Versa. Brandon University was a great experience, if somewhat harrowing at times just because of the weekly commute – particularly in winter."

The BU After Degree Program took Tanner on student teaching experiences in Winnipeg, Brandon and Seven Oaks school divisions. While incredibly valuable, he's the first to admit a classroom looks a lot different when your own name is on the door.

"Does any of it really prepare you for being on your own in your classroom when the first bell rings at the beginning of September? Well, it does and it doesn't. The thing I said to every one of my cooperating teachers during my placements was, 'I really don't see how all of this happens when there aren't two of us in the classroom.' They all laughed, but I was

dead serious. In the end, of course, we aren't alone in our classrooms—there are amazing EAs and support staff, the resource team, and our fellow teachers just a classroom away. The answer to how it happens is: 'We make it happen.'

As Lansdowne's doors opened on the morning of Sept. 8, Tanner admits to a blend of nerves and excitement, not unlike the tension of being backstage at the theatre, waiting for the curtain to rise.

"At the end of the day I think I, along with my fellow Lansdowne teachers, heaved a collective sigh and thought, OK, it's doable, we can get through this. And then maybe some of us cried a bit with relief. Maybe just me, ha!"

Lansdowne principal Vincent Audino values the lived experience of teachers coming into the profession later in their work lives, noting it brings a mature and professional perspective to teaching. "Gord is charismatic and captivating, with a genuine appreciation for teaching. I am positive that his previous experience will be an asset."

The reality of teaching during a pandemic manifests itself in lots of ways, one of which, for Tanner, was pivoting from some things he'd really been looking forward to, like group work and the all important "carpet time."

"I have a lot of temporarily unuseable material piled along the walls for when kids can share manipulatives, games and collaborative projects again. One definite disappointment I really did have to get over was the fact that in the time of COVID, carpet time is not a thing. Imagine first grade



Gordon Tanner with Grade 1 class at Winnipeg's École Lansdowne School

without carpet time! We are gradually finding ways to gather the kids while still maintaining physical distance to be able to, say, read a picture book and allow everyone to actually see the pictures.”

Audino empathizes with Tanner. Being a first-time teacher during a pandemic adds a layer of complexity to an already multi-faceted role.

“He definitely needs to be flexible, adapting to the situation,” the principal says. “Safety for staff and students trumps curriculum in the short term. Creativity is even more important and the use of manipulatives poses a challenge. First year of teaching comes with a huge workload, add a pandemic to the mix and, OUCH!”

One thing a first-year teacher of first-year students has going for him is kids are generally a forgiving lot, with no preconceived ideas about what Grade 1 is all about. Above all, Tanner says, they just want to know they’re welcome, they’re accepted, and they’re valued.

“One way that I’m lucky in being a brand-new teacher, is that I don’t have any truly ingrained habits or expectations from prior years. Not unlike my Grade 1 students who don’t really know what Grade 1 is “supposed to” be like. I’m doing my best to learn from my amazing Grade 1 colleagues who I am very thankful in a cohort with. We’re trying new things as we go along, and two weeks in, it seems to be working.”

Tanner does consider starting his career along with kids just starting school to be a unique and valuable opportunity.

“Without connecting and building relationships, teaching doesn’t really happen. At this age kids are just learning how to be part of a group that isn’t their immediate family, there’s so much learning to be done in the social sphere, and if a person doesn’t feel safe and respected and listened to, it’s doubtful that they’re going to absorb the lessons about being part of a community. All the teachers I know are relationship builders first, and lesson planners second.”

He’s quick to add that his students have been a source of strength and inspiration as they incorporate hand-washing, masks and physical distancing into their lives.

“I think these kids are doing more to help me feel normal in the time of COVID than I am for them. They’ve adapted to all of the protocols with very little difficulty or complaint and really seem to be getting on with the business of being kids.”

So, what gets a brand new teacher through the day?

“Knowing there are 23 or so hearts and minds counting on me to keep them safe and teach them stuff and provide them with an example of how we should treat each other in the world we’d like to live in.”

And what keeps him awake at night?

“Are you kidding me,” he laughs. “The real question is ‘how do I stay awake long enough to prep for the next day?’ I’m usually out by 9:30 p.m. and up again at 5:30 a.m.. Wash, rinse, and repeat.”

We’ll be checking back on Mr. Tanner’s classroom throughout the year.

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PORTFOLIO



Masks on the Runway

Masks are fast becoming a fashion statement, with Artisanal Filipino masks all the rage, says the Philippine Star. Collectors are now on the lookout for unusual masks.

"Mask makers and social entrepreneurs are creating unusual pairings, twinning masks with other fashion pieces to create a more complete look and even more of a fashion statement."

Read, with an abundance of caution

BY GEORGE STEPHENSON



#RESTART[↑]MB

WHEN SHOULD WE PANIC?

Of all the verbiage we hear every day regarding the coronavirus, none is more deadening than authorities undertaking certain tasks out of an "abundance of caution."

We move from code yellow to code orange, introduce mask mandates and crowd restrictions out of an "abundance of caution."

It sounds good; almost poetic. Too bad it doesn't really mean anything.

It seems to have replaced "now is not the time to panic" as the go-to phrase for any ongoing crisis. Perhaps that old potato has been retired since it implies there is, and will be, a time to panic. If nothing else, it might be refreshing if officials called a news conference to announce, finally, it's time to panic.

Throughout the coronavirus crisis, the government of Manitoba has held an endless number of news conferences. The now-is-not-the-time-to-panic advice was used early, but since has faded as much as anyone's hope for a "return to normal."

Abundance of caution, however, has defied herd immunity. It spread far and wide back in 2014 during the Ebola scare in the United States. Its second wave has now infected every news conference from Washington to Winnipeg.

No surprise. It is so sanguine. It suggests the problems solved in its three words are mere trifles that will be summarily dealt with. It is weighted with the same notional burden as abracadabra.

NO



NO



NO



PLEASE, STAY IN THE JET

Noel Gallagher, the former Oasis star, is outraged at having to wear a mask on public transportation. The singer alleges that he has been challenged on a number of occasions about his refusal to wear a mask on public transit or in stores.

The idea he uses public transport is somewhat dubious. Faced with having to wear a facemask on a commercial flight, he chose to hire a private jet instead for a recent holiday.



YES, JUST THE SAME

A Utah woman has sparked outrage after likening herself having to wear a facemask to the police killing of George Floyd. Floyd died after a Minneapolis police officer knelt on his neck for almost eight minutes.

"George Floyd was saying, 'I can't breathe,' and then he died," said Shauna Kinville, interviewed by a local TV station. "Now we're wearing a mask and saying 'I can't breathe' - but we're being forced to wear them."

It evokes an image that we have warehouses packed with caution; caution that we can dispense when necessary. Caution in abundance, that we use with an abundance of caution, which sounds more like the opening line of a Traveling Wilburys' song than public health policy.

We're all going to the End Of The Line.

The abundantly abundant phrase, though, isn't the only feather-bedding language being tossed about at the province's news conferences. If there was a drinking game aimed at every mention of the word "fundamentals" we'd have another health crisis to deal with.

The use of the phrase "communal living situation" as a fill-in for Hutterite colony, to avoid stigmatizing people, seems more than a tad bizarre. It sounds as if the province is dotted with cadres of lost-in-time hippies sitting mask-less around the community bong. What about their stigma?

The use of the words "close contact" also seem designed to downplay as well as obscure relevant facts. It might have more impact if officials just said: "A bunch of people had a big barbecue and now they and their families are sick. Get a brain, people!"

On the bright side, the news conferences have become somewhat, albeit unintentionally, entertaining.

It's amazing that while there has been discussions at news conferences about the

technology needed to implement proper remote education, the government doesn't engender confidence. More than six months into the crisis and they have yet to figure out how to harness technology in order for the audience to hear or understand the questions being asked. Most sound like someone announcing the latest arrival at a Bolivian train station. It is not an abundance of coherence.

And there is no lack of specific eyebrow-lifters.

Really, we go from pandemic to parody with the premier of the province explaining the finer points of hand washing or talking about the inherent dangers of "moist" sneezes. What ever happened to the good old days of mind-numbing expositions on debt and deficits?

Education Minister Kelvin Goertzen is also worth a look at these news conferences. Over these months he lost weight and, apparently, his glasses. It's the COVID makeover!

Then there are the reporters asking their muffled questions, some of which seem to go on longer than the pandemic and are equally mystifying. One tried to pin down the education minister on how many schools he had visited during the crisis to see if they were following the rules – as if that was his job.

Well, no abundance of cranium there.



Luckily, sports have no rules

Olympic volleyballer Kerri Walsh Jennings says not wearing a mask is a fight for freedom.

"Things won't open up and freedoms won't come back unless we are willing to push back and stand up for them," the three-time Olympic gold medal winner said. "I am willing to fight for the freedoms I have been guaranteed by my constitution."

She called herself "brave" by going into a store without a mask, but apparently wearing shoes and a shirt. No word on how many balls she's taken to the head.

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?
I'D LOVE TO HELP.
REACH ME AT [RJOB@MBTEACH.ORG](mailto:rjob@mbteach.org)

REFRESH

BY RAMAN JOB, PUBLIC RELATIONS FACILITATOR

COVID ALERT APP BREAKTHROUGH OR BUST?



That's the question raised after a recent Global News story cast serious doubt on the usefulness of an app launched by the federal government three months ago and already downloaded by over three million Canadians.

Health Canada says more than 95 per cent of people who test positive for COVID don't report their diagnosis using the COVID Alert app.

Ontario was the first province to adopt the \$650,000 application and the one with the most history of app use. Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, and Saskatchewan and Manitoba have all since adopted it. Quebec and others are said to be joining soon.

Getting an exposure alert on the app means the user has been exposed for at least 15 minutes to someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. It also means that the user is, in turn, required to enter a one-time "key" or code to alert others to the exposure. This happens completely anonymously and no private data is saved in or forwarded by the alert.

"If you contract COVID-19... then it is still voluntary for you to enter that one-time code into your app that will then send a signal to other phones and identify whether contact has taken place," said Cameron Friesen,

Manitoba's Health Minister in a Winnipeg Free Press interview.

However, as of this publication, only four per cent of Ontarians with a positive COVID-19 diagnosis entered their test results into the app between July 31st and Sept. 28. And as of Sept. 29, no one from the other provinces, including Manitoba, has entered a one-time key.

"This isn't going to replace or even reduce Public Health's contact tracing requirements," Dr. Brent Roussin, Manitoba's chief public health officer told CBC Manitoba.

"This will allow contacts of cases that may not have been aware that they'd been in close contact with [a case], that Public Health may not have been able to reach, to be aware that they've been in contact with an infectious person."

The soft Health Canada statistics make a good argument for promoting the app and increasing the adoption level right across the country. After all, the more people using the app, the better it will work.

The download is a no-brainer.

Who wouldn't want to know if they've been exposed to the virus, especially when their own health and that of their loved ones and colleagues is at stake?

COVID Alert is free, rides in your pocket or

purse, runs in the background and doesn't require regular maintenance.

Privacy experts have also lauded the app for the way it keeps users' identities anonymous and the fact that it will not track your location, contacts or personal health information. That's rare among the 4.5 million apps available on the App Store and Google Play Store.

Battery life could be an issue for some. The app knows you've been in the presence of someone who has tested positive because it sends out randomized bluetooth codes every five minutes. Obviously, leaving your bluetooth on throughout the day will take a toll on your battery life.

But the effort to use the app and spread the word is important according to Marika Nadeau, director general of Health Canada's COVID-19 task force. She told iPolitics.ca that because COVID-19 is "hitting young people specifically hard right now," they should download the app "to help keep their parents, their grandparents and their community safe."

As for the next few months, Nadeau says Health Canada is looking at additional languages and "complementary features that could be part of the application. We are trying to launch the application as is and move forward with some adjustments."

Leaders Write!

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*While the series is being offered at no cost, registration will be limited to 25 people who are committed to participate in all five sessions.

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