

THE MANITOBA

# Teacher

SPECIAL  
EDITION

JUNE 2021 VOLUME 99 NUMBER 7 NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY

SLAM THE  
DOOR  
ON **64**

# Maternity & Parental Leave



Are you planning to take maternity and/or parental leave? Information is available on our website at [mbteach.org](http://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)

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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, June 15, 2021**

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

# Teacher

JUNE 2021 VOLUME 99 NUMBER 7 NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY

P.4 *From the President*

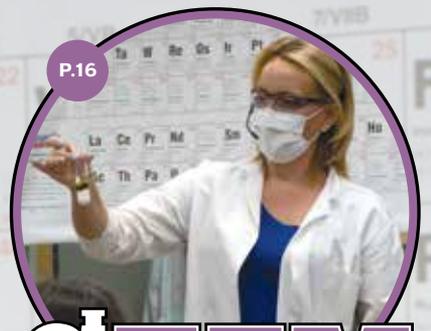
P.5 *Inside MTS*



P.6 *Slam the Door on 64 Campaign*  
*Informing teachers and the public about the dangers of Bill 64*



P.14 *Diary of a First Year Teacher*  
*Gordon Tanner fast forwards to June experiencing untold changes*



P.16

## STEM for Girls

*Introducing more girls to the excitement of science, technology, engineering and mathematics*



P.18

*Orchestrated Chaos*  
*Navigating the challenges of teaching music in a pandemic*



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

**JAMES BEDFORD**

I'm not an athlete – not by anyone's stretch of the imagination. I curl reasonably well, thanks in part to the guys I play with. But when I taught, I thought of myself as a coach. I encouraged students to work together, to support one another as a team. Competition was fine if it brought out the best in everyone.

I see that attitude reflected in the Society's work. We were forced into a race to settle collective agreements across the province and we won that race by the narrowest of margins. #fairdealforteachers was plastered across social media, and we all held our breath waiting for the Winnipeg Teachers' Association to ratify their agreement on May 20. Please thank your Local bargainer, they deserve it.

Throughout this pandemic we have also been in a race of sorts. I expect that there are many of you who tune in at 12:30 every day to hear the latest COVID-19 numbers.

We are all concerned about safety, our own and that of those around us. How to achieve that safety has been more challenging because it is not easy to quantify it into a single action. Should everyone wear a mask always? Should schools be open or should learning be remote? Should vaccines be mandatory, or should people have choice?

We don't have every answer, but your Society spends a great deal of time listening in order to gather and distribute credible information. I wish the same were true of the provincial government. All too often I hear an elected official say that the Society was consulted on a matter, or that we knew a decision was coming. It is regretful that, since January, nothing could be further from the truth. We hear of decisions when they are announced, be it COVID-19 numbers in schools, moving to remote learning, or plans for teacher vaccinations in North Dakota.

This is nothing like the classrooms and schools we work in; collaborative places of learning where we recognize that the best outcomes, winning educational races with our students, come from working together.

As a Society, we believe in building relationships for the benefit of larger communities. It is those relationships that facilitated the negotiation of all thirty-eight collective agreements with our employers, school trustees. I believe that those relationships have helped make our schools safer places this year. And I believe they contributed to the Provincial Council decision about our Society becoming a member of the Manitoba Federation of Labour. There we can work together with more than thirty unions to build a province that is fairer for everyone.

I wish that a collaborative relationship with government had existed throughout this pandemic. I think our schools, and those who learn and work in them, would have been safer for it.



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# INSIDE MTS

## COURAGE AND COMMITMENT TO EQUITY

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

**“Courage my friends, ‘tis not too late to build a better world.”**

*- Tommy Douglas, champion of democracy*

The character of any society is determined by its collective commitment to justice. Justice quite simply is equity; equitable access to basic human rights and to the ability to find our purpose. It is about looking at our communities and advocating to address the societal inequities that continue to give voice to some and silence the voices of others.

Unions are an integral part of that fight. Our gains – bargained or otherwise – impact the rights and well-being of everyone well beyond our educational communities. Our work and more importantly our values are underpinned by our understanding of relational accountability, of justice, and of the world we want to leave our children.

Empowering our union and our members to engage in justice work is not easy. We need to have uncomfortable conversations and moments of introspection to grow in our understanding of equity and oppression. We need to be courageous.

At the Annual General Meeting of Provincial Council 2021, members passed the following resolutions to guide our justice work:

### **Resolution 2021-2 Dependent Care Per Diem to \$15**

Increasing the per diem for dependent care from the current \$11.90/hr to \$15/hr, supports a livable minimum wage in Manitoba and the ‘Fight for \$15’.

### **Resolution 2021-6 MFL**

Joining the Manitoba Federation of Labour is an act of solidarity with all public sector workers. There is no greater need for this collective strength than right now at a time that multiple bills threaten labour rights, and central tenants of public education.



### **Resolution 2021-7 Ad Hoc 2SLGBTQIA+**

This ad hoc committee will investigate and report on the barriers faced by 2SLGBTQIA+ members within the Society and with school divisions. This work is essential to furthering the Society’s commitment to 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive education, and to providing safe environments for our members.

### **Resolution 2021-8 Equity Audit**

MTS is dedicated to ensuring that our policies and practices are founded in the principles of equity, justice, and anti-racism and that all members feel a sense of belonging. The audit provides the opportunity to critically examine structures, processes and engagement strategies using an equity lens.

### **Resolution 2021-9 Gender Neutral Language**

Language is among the most common mechanisms by which gender is constructed and reinforced. Using gender neutral and diversity inclusive language is a powerful way to promote gender equality and eradicate gender bias. Through this resolution, the Society affirms its commitment to gender neutral language and supports all divisions and locals to do the same.

As a union of educators, we continue our journey to be better, to stand strong against attacks on public education and to create the world that Tommy Douglas spoke of more than 60 years ago. We are thankful to our members who challenge us to do better, to be better and to raise the voices of all.



# SLAM THE DOOR ON **64**

## Campaign in Full Swing!

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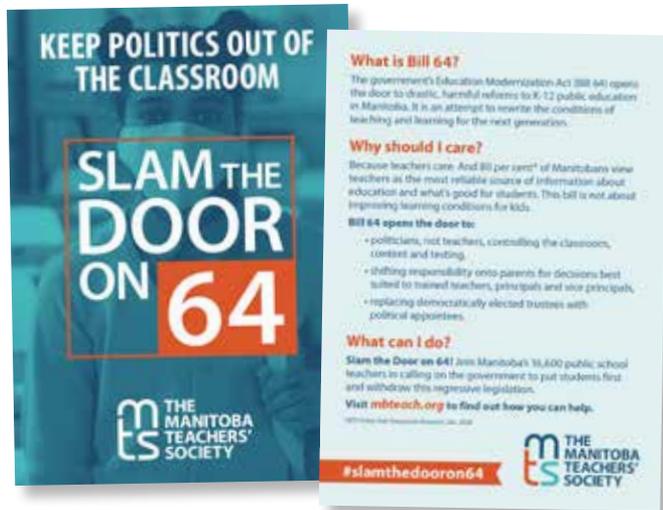
We're on the radio, in the newspaper, on your lawn and even in your mailbox!

MTS actively opposes Bill 64, the provincial government's ironically named Education Modernization Act. The *#slamthedooron64* campaign is a multi-layered communication strategy aimed at informing teachers and members of the public about the dangers of the bill, and to offer tangible tools to help Manitobans to *#raiseyourvoice*. You'll see *#slamthedooron64* on a variety of media platforms from now until October, 2021, when members of the public will have

their chance to speak to the Legislative Committee considering Bill 64.

Click [here](#) to find the MTS Slam the Door on 64 toolkit. It includes a variety of ways you can help defeat this regressive legislation. In it you'll find a Q+A on the bill, the key concerns of MTS, information on the importance of teachers speaking to the Legislative Committee considering Bill 64, tips on writing to elected officials or the editor of your newspaper, a facebook frame you can use on social media, and more!

# MTS Communicates to Educate



## POSTCARDS

You may have received this postcard in the mail in mid-May. MTS sent them to 250,000 homes throughout the province.



## ADVERTISING

These full-page ads appeared in the Winnipeg Free Press and Brandon Sun on May 8 and 15. They're filled with the powerful words of our members commenting on their concerns about Bill 64's implications for teaching and learning, for equity and representation of diverse voices, for principals and vice principals, and more.

Radio ads join the suite of communication materials in June. Throughout the summer, watch for billboards along routes to beaches, popular campgrounds and tourist attractions. And as always, keep your eye on social media for info to share with your networks.

Starting in September, we'll ramp up the campaign with more information and tools, right up 'til late fall when it's expected that Bill 64 will be heard by a Committee of the Legislature.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Anyone can register to speak against Bill 64! Call the Office of the Clerk (204) 945-3636 to register. If you'd prefer to provide a written submission on Bill 64, send it to:

Clerk of Committees  
Room 251 – 450 Broadway  
Winnipeg MB R3C 0V8

You may also fax your submission to (204) 945-0038, or send it by email to: [committees@leg.gov.mb.ca](mailto:committees@leg.gov.mb.ca).

Written submissions must be received before the committee considering the bill concludes its deliberations so that they may be provided to committee members.



## BILL 64 TOOLKIT

The Slam the Door on 64 toolkit includes a Q+A on the bill, the key concerns of MTS, information on the importance of teachers speaking to the legislative committee considering Bill 64, tips on writing to elected officials or the editor of your newspaper, a facebook frame you can use on social media, and more!

Visit [mbteach.org](http://mbteach.org) to find out how you can help.  
#slamthedoorn64 | #raiseyourvoice

# Highlights from 2021 MTS AGM

BY MATEA TUHTAR



The Society hosted its second virtual annual general meeting May 13-15<sup>th</sup>, a follow up to last year's three-hour emergency session that passed the budget and elected the new provincial executive, but deferred many of the resolutions to this year.

"I believe that we can all agree that last year's virtual meeting did not reflect what has been our history," said MTS President James Bedford in his speech to delegates. "It was, for all intents, a stop-gap to ensure the continued operation of the Society in very uncertain times. This year, once we realized that our meeting was going to be virtual, and with considerably more time to plan, we committed to an interactive meeting that better reflected our traditions."

This year, delegates were able to watch, vote, comment, and chat in the meeting. Friday was designated for small group/breakout sessions to discuss the resolutions which were then voted on in Saturday's session, as well as provincial executive elections.

## Provincial Executive Welcomes New Members

There will be one new face on the MTS Provincial Executive after a vote by delegates to the 102<sup>nd</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Provincial Council.

There were five positions open for members-at large.

### Newly elected was:

- Lindsay Brown  
*Seven Oaks*

### Re-elected were:

- Sonja Blank  
*Mountain View*
- Carla Bouchard  
*Pembina Trails*
- Kent McPherson  
*St. James-Assiniboia*
- Cynthia Taylor  
*Louis Riel*

## Mental Health Workshop to be Offered by Society

The Society will offer on demand workshops intended for members interested in exploring ideas related to wellness, teacher mental health, and resilience. Information about these three workshops can be found [here](#).

The decision was brought forward to address and prioritize the mental health and well-being of educators, especially because of the challenges they have had to face and continue to face during the pandemic.

## MTS to Join the Manitoba Federation of Labour

The Society will join the likes of MNU, MGEU and UMFA in joining the Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL) effective September 1, 2021.

"The provincial government has done nothing but attack the public education system in Manitoba," says the rationale put forth by the MTS Provincial Executive,

“and the list of examples expands with each passing week: another education funding announcement that amounts to a reduction, interference in the collective bargaining process, secrecy surrounding the Education Modernization Act, and silence regarding the release of the K-12 Commission report. Joining the MFL is not only an act of solidarity with all public sector workers in Manitoba but would be a huge benefit to the 16,600 members of the Society. There is no greater need for this show of support and collective strength than right now.”

Vice-President Nathan Martindale said that the move will give MTS “a seat at the table, and the opportunity to work collaboratively with other unions.”

Affiliation to the MFL also requires affiliation to the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) with total cost to members set at \$22.20 per year. Members will also pay an additional \$3.48 per year to local Labour Councils.

### **Society to Lobby Government to Make MTS PD Day Mandatory**

It has been resolved that the Society lobby the provincial government to make MTS PD Day mandatory for school divisions/districts to release MTS members for professional development.

With amalgamations ahead, the Society wants to ensure that all members continue to have access to MTS PD Day and ensure that the hard work volunteered by SAGE groups continues for future years.

### **Member Fees Up Slightly**

Delegates to the MTS Annual General Meeting approved a new budget, with the membership fee slightly higher than the previous year.

The annual fee for full members will be \$1,047, up from \$1,042.

### **Delegates Have Their Say: AGM Feedback**

After another successful AGM delegates have this to say:

- I loved the electronic voting. Please consider using it when we are once again able to meet in person for the AGM!
- It would be good if the entire event were held on one technical platform, rather than switching back and forth between Zoom and Webcast.



- I felt that some of the debate was too rushed on Saturday due to time constraints. It would have been nice, as well, to see at least a count of the number of members queued up at each “mic”, pro and con.
- The breakout sessions on Friday to discuss resolutions were great! It allowed everyone to have a say, no matter how new or experienced you were to AGMs.
- Great experience. The last day with no breaks was a challenge, though.
- I appreciated the simplicity of the PX candidate campaigns. I have never liked being accosted with promotional materials. The “stick to business” campaign format was a win for me.
- Most things went very smoothly. I wonder if there is a way to share more of the questions on the electronic dashboard, since I felt some got lost in the shuffle.
- I was very impressed with what we were able to accomplish in less than ideal circumstances. The breakout rooms were very useful.
- I wish there were representatives from the locals moving resolutions in the breakout groups to provide context and detail. It would be great to discuss the resolution with the mover.
- Thursday had too many breaks. Let’s get to the important work of resolutions sooner.
- This being my first AGM, I found the digital platform worked very well. While it seems like many delegates prefer an in-person meeting, I felt expressing my opinion in the breakout rooms was very effective.
- It was striking to me to see the number of delegates who have attended many AGMs. The concern is that we hear from the same voices every year. It would be great to have more members attend.
- I would have liked to have done a “test” on the Zoom and Webcast platforms in advance. This would have made me feel less stressed about the online process.
- I felt the breakout rooms were fantastic because it allowed a smaller group of people to meet and share opinions, when they might not have done so at the “mic” in front of all the delegates. I loved how quick and efficient the voting process was and that we saw the results immediately.
- Thank you for making the event interactive, even though it was virtual.
- A challenging scenario handled very well by staff and PX. Occasional technical difficulties aside, very smooth for such an undertaking.
- I have attended AGM before but never spoke to anyone besides my own local members. The breakout rooms were a safe way to speak up.
- Love the small breakouts, the voting, the resolution vetting on Friday. MTS is a progressive, forward thinking, ahead of the curve organization. I love it!
- I would like the Society to entertain a hybrid online and in-person AGM where the breakout rooms/discussion of resolutions takes place online and then delegates come together in person on Friday.



# THE PRICE OF PARTISAN POLITICS

**BY JAMES BEDFORD**

*PRESIDENT OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY*

*Reprinted from the Winnipeg Free Press, May 18, 2021*

Ask teachers what they need in their classrooms and you'll get a variety of answers. They will speak of basic necessities like teaching supplies, crucial supports like educational assistants and clinicians, and access to resources for their most vulnerable students.

Teachers will also tell you that they need coats, boots and toques for students who can't afford them, because too many of them can't. They will also tell you that they need food for kids who "forgot" their lunch, again. And again.

Ultimately, teachers need classroom spaces that nurture informed, empathic, curious, creative children who grow into critical thinkers, inspired and equipped to build a better world.

What teachers do not need in their classrooms is partisan politics. And yet, should Bill 64 pass this fall, political interference in the classroom is exactly what teachers are going to get.

Under the terms of Bill 64, the ironically named Education Modernization Act, duly and democratically elected school trustees will be replaced by a centralized board of political appointees. The party faithful will, in turn, drive decisions around what and how students learn; while parents will be saddled with fundamental decision-making related to teacher hiring and discipline, oversight of student assessment, valuation of "sensitive" content, and more. This work

is best suited to teachers and principal teachers specially trained in education and school leadership.

This proposed upheaval plays out against the backdrop of insufficient education funding, a chronic, compounding cancer in Manitoba for five straight years. A number of Manitoba school divisions announced significant cuts to their budgets this spring, a direct result of government neglect. With so called funding "increases" that keep pace with neither the rate of inflation nor enrolment growth, and now the added burden of a property tax freeze, it's no wonder school divisions are compelled to cut valuable programs on the backs of kids and teachers.

Speaking to her division's draft budget in March, Pembina Trails School Division Board Chair Kathleen McMillan put it succinctly: "There is no way we can avoid reductions in services to our students. With no taxation authority and insufficient funding from the province, we are left in an unfortunate position."

With a third wave of the pandemic upon us, this government places no priority on improving learning conditions for students. Instead, it cloaks its sordid intent to take control of classrooms in manufactured panic over standardized tests designed by for-profit corporations. And why not? The mania surrounding these fundamentally flawed and demonstrably debunked

assessments conveniently obscures the real and growing challenges facing classrooms today.

Simply put, this government has created a crisis to distract from its unconscionable abandonment of education. And as important programming is sacrificed on the altar of austerity and one-size fits all testing, teachers quickly become a target—those very same teachers the premier and his education ministers have praised so well for their commitment and sacrifice in the face of a global crisis.

I'll give the government this: It's a clever gambit. And unless Manitobans raise their voices in opposition to Bill 64, it just might work. We need look no further than the United States, roiled, angry and broken, to see the impact of an education system eroded by underfunding so subtly and for so long that no one notices until the damage is catastrophic.

A vibrant, responsive public education system is a right, not a privilege. It is an equalizer, a healer, a crucible of critical thought and the anchor of a just society. MTS members are mobilizing in its defense, and we will not back down.

Our province's teachers need many things in their classrooms, but partisan politics isn't one of them. I implore all Manitobans to join teachers and vehemently oppose Bill 64.

We cannot be silent. There is too much at stake.



# BILL 64

## TOOLKIT

The MTS toolkit gives you background on the legislation, how it impacts teachers, and most importantly, how you can #raiseyourvoice as a Manitoba educator in opposition to Bill 64.

Visit [mbteach.org](http://mbteach.org) for more information.

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[practicum.education@umanitoba.ca](mailto:practicum.education@umanitoba.ca)



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# OUR UNION, OUR PROFESSION, OUR FIGHT

BY DANIELLE FULLAN KOLTON, PH.D.

Since the new year, MTS has squarely faced a variety of significant issues: vaccination priority for teachers and school staff, remote learning 2.0, Bill 64, The BEST strategy, Bill 45, and the list goes on. Individually, each of these challenges represents a clear and present danger to all that MTS, as a teachers' union, stands for and is built upon. Taken as a whole, however, these provocations signal a rapidly declining regard for teachers, the profession, and the purpose of public education.

It is against this backdrop that on Thursday, May 20, we celebrated a momentous victory – ratification of the 38th of 38 collective agreements between Manitoba teachers and their employers, a historic and sweeping accomplishment of our 16,600 members, local leaders, and staff.

This is a wide-reaching achievement because in 2017 the government held bargaining hostage with Bill 28 (The Public Services Sustainability Act) by attempting to levy wage freezes and eliminate the right to negotiate. While the Bill was ruled unconstitutional, a sticky residue impacted bargaining with pressure and controls imposed right to the eleventh hour. Despite this interference, all contracts were settled by a collective will to do the right thing.

In the weeks preceding the final settlement, our social media campaign *#FairDealForTeachers* trended broadly, and teachers across the province became a collective force. The final contract was ratified by members mere hours before Bill 45 received Royal Assent, the consequences of which would have cast a shadow on any bargaining in progress. Once proclaimed, Bill 45 would render teachers in those divisions empty-handed and without a contract until the first provincial bargaining settlement.

## OUR UNION

Because Bill 45 – The Public Schools Amendment and MTS Amendment Act – changes the way that teachers negotiate, moving to a single-tier model of provincial bargaining, these settlements mark the conclusion of seventy-three years of local bargaining for Manitoba teachers that dates back to 1948.

In 1956, teachers were removed from The Labour Relations Act (LRA) and provisions regarding the rights of teachers were placed in The Public Schools Act (PSA). Among a variety of changes related to teacher rights and contract bargaining within education, arbitration became the final dispute

resolution mechanism, and strikes and lockouts were deemed illegal.

Bill 45 is deeply troubling because the new teacher employer – the provincial government – requires arbitrators to consider the ability of the employer – also the provincial government – to pay. Since arbitration is the only lever in teacher bargaining disputes and Bill 45 impedes the neutrality of an arbitration board, teachers lose any authentic means of robust, free, effective, and fair collective bargaining. With a government focussed on austerity, this is not about *ability* to pay, it is about *willingness* to pay.

But free and fair collective bargaining is about more than money. Sure, wage increases that keep up with the rate of inflation fuel a healthy economy. But the greedy-teacher narrative grossly distorts and

 **When free and fair bargaining is disregarded, it signals a deep shift in government ideology away from the collective towards individualism, away from agency towards power, and away from the public towards privatization.**

implies a singular motive behind collective bargaining, painting the union as a narrow self-interest group focussed on protecting the economic interests of its members.

Collective bargaining shapes working conditions and seeks fair remuneration for the professional and specialized expertise of teachers; expertise that is reflective of an increasingly complex, vital, and esteemed profession. And those working conditions cannot be uncoupled from students' learning conditions – the two are symbiotic, interdependent.

For this reason, bargaining extends far beyond the interests of teachers to obvious and powerful connections to the welfare of students and more broadly to the community. When free and fair bargaining is disregarded, it signals a deep shift in government ideology away from the collective towards individualism, away from agency towards power, and away from the public towards privatization. Inequities widen in a society of competition and comparison which rapidly sorts winners

and losers and disenfranchises many along the way. Austerity is the beating heart at the centre of all of it.

Anti-union sentiment is the foundation of this shift and the consequences, documented widely across the globe, include the slow collapse of public services like health and education, resurgence of child poverty, and the 'epidemic of loneliness', as one author aptly described it.

## OUR PROFESSION

As a professional organization, The Manitoba Teachers' Society is more than a union. While we work to uphold rights, process, and voice, we also work in service to students, to the cause of public education, and to the status of the teaching profession. In doing so, we will not be diminished to a singular economic-seeking function

 **The Manitoba Teachers' Society is you and me and us: It exists in communities that span the vast geography of our province. Safeguarding bargaining rights and the status of the profession demand engagement of the collective.**

that serves to detract from the social responsibility teachers fervently serve.

Throughout our 102-year history, teachers have consistently sought the power, as a professional and self-governing body, to influence decisions affecting public education. The Manitoba Teachers' Society Act, assented in 1942, marked a turning point in the affairs of Manitoba teachers. It represented the culmination of years of struggle and achievement for professional status that ensured MTS representation on a long list of boards, in organizations and on committees with wide input and influence. We will fight to continue to have the voices of our members at the table and informing public education.

However, the pursuit of professional status means something much different now than it did in the beginning. The Society recognizes how important it is to uphold the role of teachers, and we must fiercely defend it from insinuations that reduce bargaining to an issue of money. We must be vigilant and responsive to attempts to inject political

interference into curriculum and pedagogy, remove education experts from decision making on education issues, and reduce education to the metrics of standardized testing of economic end-goals.

## OUR FIGHT

The Manitoba Teachers' Society is you and me and us: It exists in communities that span the vast geography of our province. Safeguarding bargaining rights and the status of the profession demand engagement of the collective: We are all the MTS.

This year has been peppered with calls to action that you have answered: *#UseYourVoice*, *#RaiseYourVoice*, *#FairDealForTeachers*, *#SlamTheDoorOn64*. Teachers have written letters, presented at committee, staked lawn signs, and participated in town halls. Teachers have

 **In the wake of the pandemic crisis when citizens are distracted, this government is trying to impose dangerous policy. We must pay attention, stay informed, talk to others, and act.**

joined grassroots community groups, honked their horns, and shared their stories. We cannot stop.

At a time when democracy and participation are more important than ever, members become the most valuable resource to one another, and we will support you. Your voices matter. Your stories, input, and feedback inform our work and drive the narrative, and we count on you to stay connected to us and to one another.

We have our work cut out for us in the coming year to raise the profile of union, labour, justice, and public service policies and issues. In the wake of the pandemic crisis when citizens are distracted, this government is trying to impose dangerous policy. We must pay attention, stay informed, talk to others, and act. Solidarity and confidence build bridges between the work that we do and the society that we live in and envision. Collectively and for the common good, we cannot afford to be silent.



**TIRED BUT INSPIRED:**

# DIARY OF A FIRST YEAR TEACHER

**BY ANNE BENNETT**

**W**hen we last checked in, first-year teacher Gordon Tanner had launched his education career directly into the choppy waters of a pandemic (*It's a First*, *The Manitoba Teacher*, Oct/Nov., 2020). Fast forward to June, 2021, and COVID rages on, while Tanner and colleagues everywhere have experienced untold change.

For Tanner, perhaps the biggest of them came partway through the year when he migrated from teaching a grade one class at Winnipeg's École Lansdowne to half-day kindergarten and half-day resource.

"Initially I was filling a maternity leave term position, and once the teacher returned, I could have been in a bit of a spot," he says. "I was fortunate that there was another opportunity and I got to stay on. It's a great school."

Reflecting on the year gone by, the actor-turned-educator says the ever-

shifting professional landscape meant that he had to shed preconceived notions of what a classroom does, and how a teacher works. Weighing new pathways, possibilities, and problems, too, became endemic to the job. Early career improv work was no doubt helpful!

"Because this was my first year in the classroom, I didn't have all the expectations of how things "should" go. So that was an advantage. On the other hand, I didn't have that rich experience to draw on, and there were definitely times when I could have used it. I'm fortunate, though, to have colleagues – some much younger than me, but seasoned educators – who have been very generous with their counsel and support."

Months of part in-class and part remote learning with little warning before each shift has many teachers reeling, Tanner included.

"They say, 'what doesn't kill you

makes you stronger', but under the circumstances it's felt more like 'what doesn't kill you just exhausts you!'"

The mental toll of teaching for the first time in this most unusual of times has Tanner reflecting on how he's wired for work, and its impact on his practice.

"As a brand new teacher, I guess my worst fear is that I've learned how to be a teacher during a pandemic, which is to say, if things go back to something close to 'normal' in the fall, then I'll get to be a first year teacher all over again. That's my worst fear."

Still, for Tanner, the tendency to question and to worry about the impact of all this change is tempered by what he calls the "unexpected upsides" of the year.

"Making it through this first year as a teacher during COVID has taught me to stay calm, to have realistic expectations, to truly rely on my

fellow team members, to get rest, and wash my hands regularly. Seriously, wash your hands!”

He likens the school year to training for a marathon in the high altitudes of a place like Boulder, Colorado.

“My hope is that when the restrictions are lifted it will be like coming back down to sea level and feeling, like, a superhuman burst of energy. Or maybe just a regular human burst of energy? Or maybe just not so tired. I’d settle for just not feeling really tired all the time,” he laughs.

And so Tanner is emerging in June largely unscathed, and in some ways richer for the obstacles he’s faced.

“Building relationships with students based on authenticity, compassion, and humour still seems to provide the best support for the academic side. No matter what the given circumstances, they still want to be met where they are, and respected and valued, and laughed with and challenged. I feel really good about the relationships I’ve been a part of building this year.”

And what of summer? For Tanner and his wife, Ardith, some well-earned R+R is in store.

**Because this was my first year in the classroom, I didn’t have all the expectations of how things “should” go. So that was an advantage. On the other hand, I didn’t have that rich experience to draw on, and there were definitely times when I could have used it. I’m fortunate, though, to have colleagues – some much younger than me, but seasoned educators – who have been very generous with their counsel and support.**

*-Gordon Tanner, first-year teacher*



“I foresee a good deal of camping and spending time on Manitoba’s (gentler) waterways as a way of relaxing and recharging this summer. And look, I don’t want to jinx anything, but boy, would it ever be nice to sit around a bonfire with a few good friends!”



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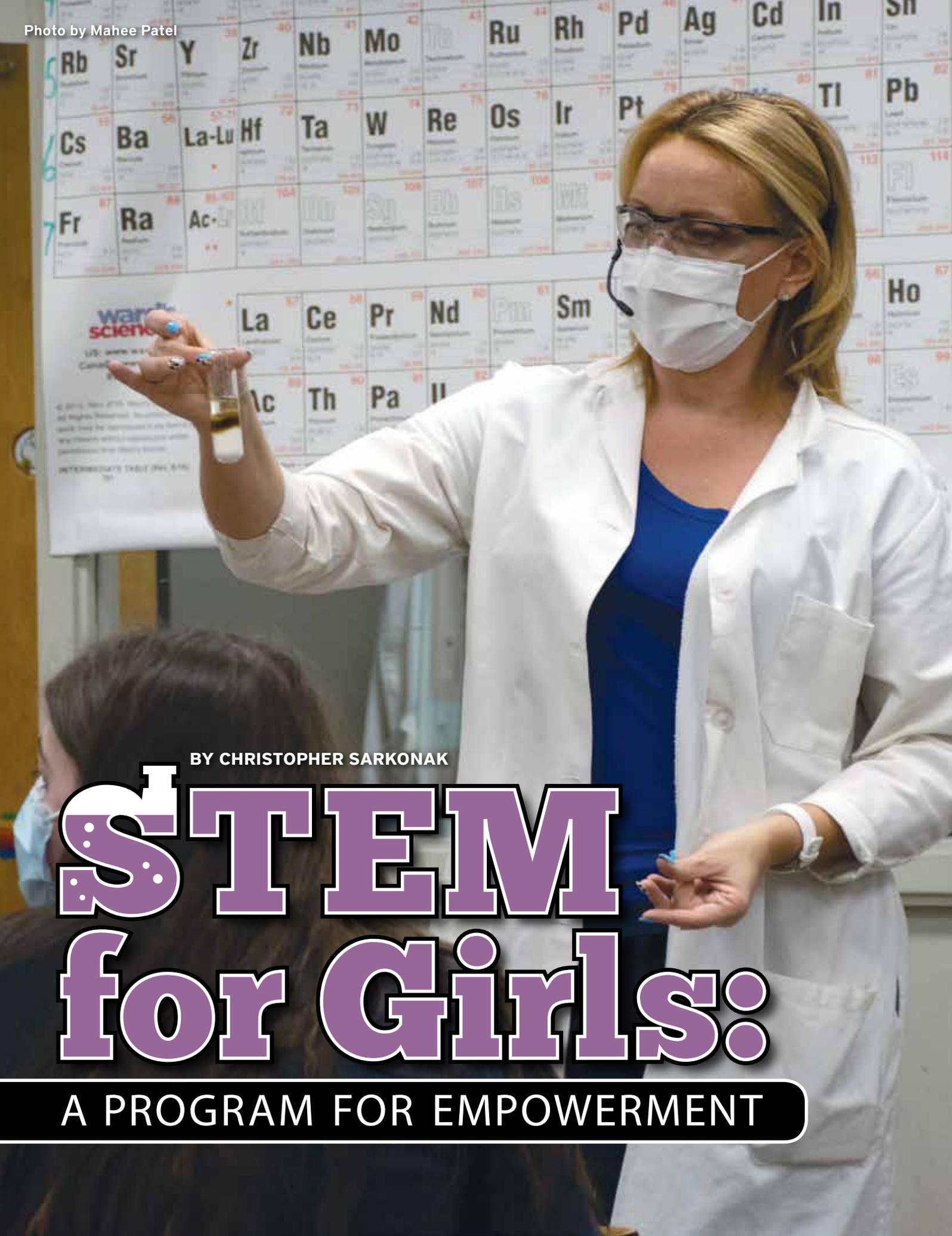
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Photo by Mahee Patel



BY CHRISTOPHER SARKONAK

# STEM for Girls:

A PROGRAM FOR EMPOWERMENT

At Crocus Plains Regional Secondary School in Brandon, we've made introducing more girls to the excitement of the STEM\* fields a priority for the past three years. Our 2021 STEM for Girls program wrapped up after virtually hosting 10 different presenters from around the world from April 12-23.

The program launched in 2018-19, when Zeel Patel, a Grade 12 student in my physics class, approached me about what she could do to attract more young women to the STEM fields. Having been the only female in her AP calculus, AP computer science, and Grade 12 physics, she wanted to make sure no other girl would have to go through these courses being the only girl in the room. From there, Zeel developed a plan for a week-long program with my input and guidance as teacher supervisor.

This first year saw a variety of interactive workshops from STEM teachers at Crocus Plains as well as Let's Talk Science! from Brandon University. A similar program was held last year that built off the success of the first event, but with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we looked for a new approach.

After discussion with this year's Grade 12 student organizer, Kendal Giesbrecht, and her STEM for Girls committee, composed entirely of Students, we decided to make this year's program virtual. We used contacts I had developed at CERN, the Perimeter Institute, and the Canadian Light Source to book world-leading experts from each of these institutions and a few teachers at Crocus Plains that were able to provide physically distanced, interactive workshops. This year's program was also open to students across the Brandon School Division. Teachers joined with their classrooms from the other high schools as well as a couple of grades five and six classes and even a grade three student.

Women presenters were selected to cover as many of the STEM fields as possible. Students had the opportunity to speak with experts on everything from fake news to volcanoes. These extraordinarily accomplished women spoke about

**Our virtual program made it possible for these incredibly successful women from around the world to speak to students at a high school on the Canadian prairies, but students still hope for the face-to-face return of STEM to Crocus.**

their journeys and the challenges they faced in what are typically male-dominated fields.

For special presentations in May and June, I reached out to Dr. Manjit Dosanjh, a leading cancer expert

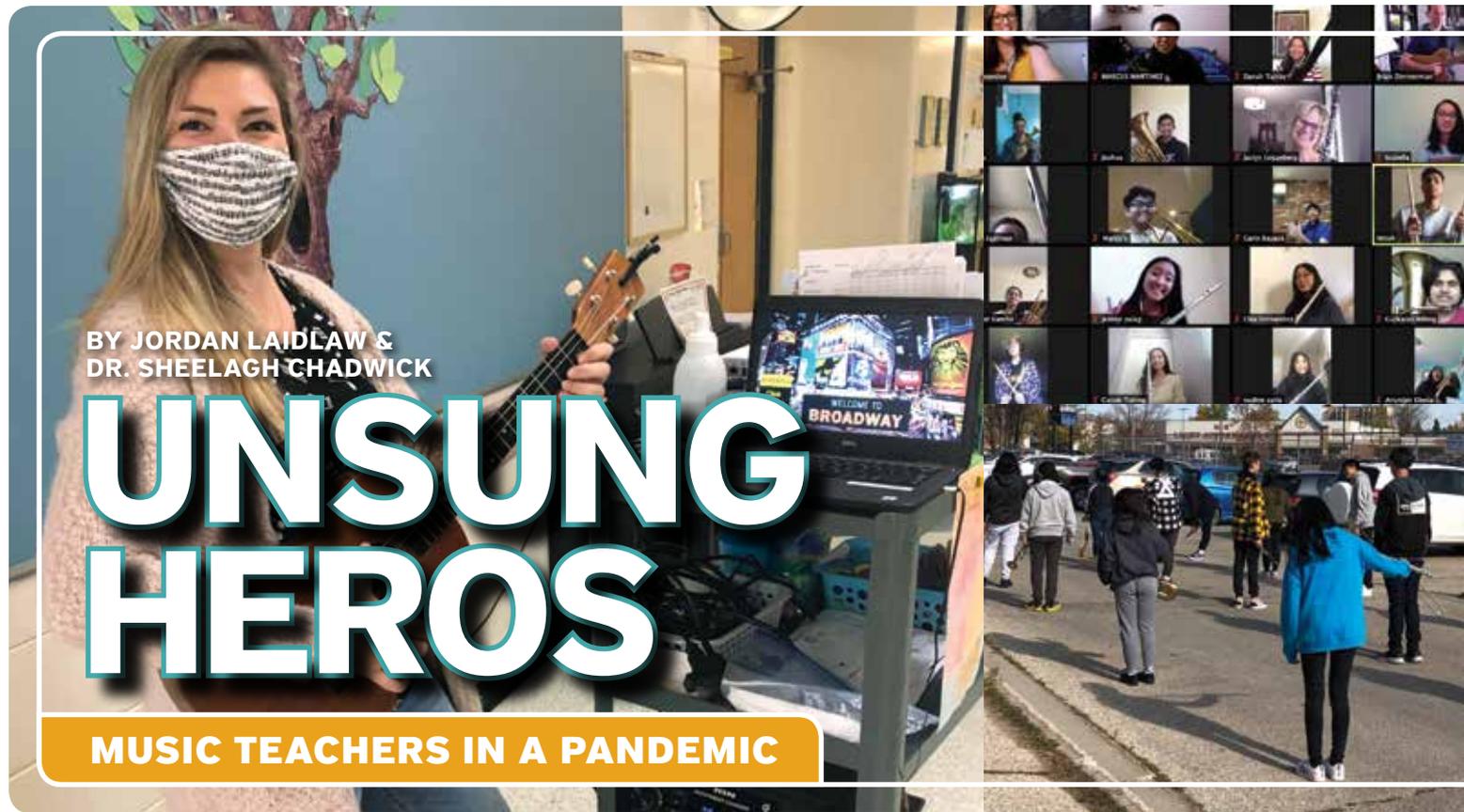
and the senior medical advisor at CERN, plus renowned astrophysicist and author, Dr. Katie Mack. Dr. Dosanjh's first of two talks was on cancer research and how small particle accelerators using protons or carbon ions, can be used to target cancer cells in patients without harming healthy cells, with little to no side effects. Her second talk was on her work as the United Nations representative for the International Federation of University Women and as a Champion for Women in Science. She recently contributed to an international panel at the UN's Commission on the Status of Women on the empowerment of women through STEM. Dr. Mack recently released *The End of Everything* (Astrophysically Speaking), which was recognized as one of the New York Times' Notable Books of 2020.

Our virtual program made it possible for these incredibly successful women from around the world to speak to students at a high school on the Canadian prairies, but students still hope for the face-to-face return of STEM to Crocus.

Every school could benefit tremendously from a program like this and it doesn't require rounding up a panel of world-renowned professionals. Local students and educators are just as keen to share their knowledge. Young women in school today need to see that they can be successful at STEM. They need to know that it is a dream to pursue, and that whatever they choose, they need to follow their dreams.

At this year's Brandon Teachers Association's L.I.F.T. event on the Provincial PD Day, I will be presenting on the STEM for Girls program that we have developed at Crocus Plains. Recordings of the STEM for Girls program presentations can be found on the Crocus Plains website at <https://www.bsd.ca/schools/Crocus/announcements/Pages/STEM-For-Girls.aspx> and more information on the presenters at <https://www.bsd.ca/schools/Crocus/News/Pages/STEM-for-Girls-at-CPRSS.aspx>.

\*Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics



BY JORDAN LAIDLAW & DR. SHEELAGH CHADWICK

# UNSUNG HEROS

MUSIC TEACHERS IN A PANDEMIC

**This school year has been a year unlike any other, as we all navigate the challenges of teaching to our best potential while operating during a global pandemic. While all educators have had their practices impacted by COVID-19, there has been little attention given to Manitoba music teachers and their concerns.**

From the beginning of the 2020/2021 school year, government regulations have prohibited indoor singing and music-making on woodwind and brass instruments. As a result, many music teachers have been reassigned to new positions and subject areas, have traded their music rooms for travelling carts, and have had their practices turned upside down.

These struggles have motivated us to initiate a research project into the experiences of music educators during the pandemic, giving voice to Manitoba music teachers' successes and concerns, and formulating recommendations to the provincial government and school administration on how to support music teachers and the future of their programs. To these ends, in February, with the support of the Manitoba Music Educators' Association (MMEA, an MTS-affiliated SAGE) we launched a research survey/questionnaire open to music teachers

across Manitoba. The intent: to gather their perspectives on how the pandemic has impacted their professional practice and sense of well-being. There has been a significant interest in this research as 218 music teachers across Manitoba participated in the survey/questionnaire. The preliminary findings have been noteworthy (as outlined in the table on page 19).

Les Chalmers, a music teacher in River East Transcona School Division, and president of the Manitoba Music Educators' Association, comments that: "Our research findings from this study have now been reported by the Winnipeg Free Press, CBC Manitoba, and on the CBC national program, *As It Happens*. The findings highlight what we are seeing with teachers every day and what we hear through anecdotal stories. These findings help to let people know they are not alone. The prospect of losing good, experienced teachers is obviously upsetting."

Chalmers further notes that "The MMEA is working tirelessly behind the scenes to advocate for them. We are all music teachers and are living with similar struggles and realities every day. We have a personal stake in the outcome of this and other issues affecting quality music programs."

These findings are only preliminary, as the research study is ongoing. We expect to release a more thorough preliminary findings report to Manitoba music teachers for May, 2021, and a final report during the summer. Music teachers across Manitoba have demonstrated outstanding resilience in the face of adversity and have continued to provide rich artistic experiences to children and youth. They deserve a standing ovation for their efforts. We are confident that educational leadership across the province will consider these findings carefully and listen to what teachers are suggesting, in order to secure the future of our school music programs.

*Jordan Laidlaw is a music teacher in Seven Oaks School Division and a PhD candidate in educational administration.*

*Dr. Sheelagh Chadwick is an associate professor of music education at Brandon University.*



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## Study Strikes Sour Notes

### TEACHING MUSIC DURING THE PANDEMIC

**52%** of respondents are teaching a different classroom subject area

**88%** did not receive any professional development in this new area of teaching practice

**55%** are not teaching in their music room (Their practice has been shifted to travelling carts, alternative spaces, outdoors, etc.)

### MUSIC TEACHER WELL-BEING

**85%** feel fatigued from work

**79%** report that work is causing stress in their personal lives

**46%** are feeling sleep deprived

**45%** feel their confidence as an educator has decreased

**33%** report increased alcohol/cannabis consumption

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

**77%** have concerns for the future of their music program

**50%** have concerns relating to future employment

**47%** have considered early retirement and/or a change in careers

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**THE  
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# POETRY PEN PALS BUILD CONNECTION

BY ANNE BENNETT

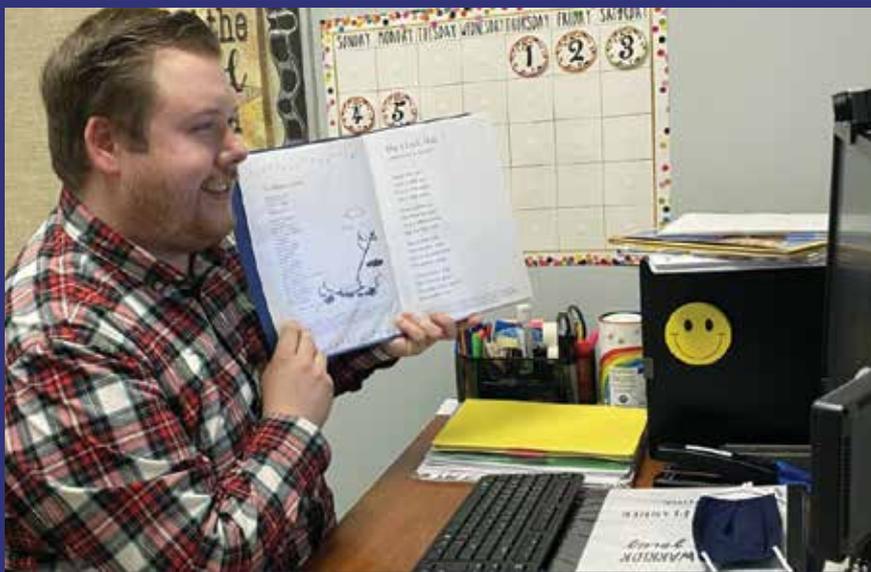
You might expect first-year teacher Scott Templeton to feel like he'd been hit by a freight train – repeatedly – this past year. Having graduated in 2020 from the University of Winnipeg's Faculty of Education, his learned experience of the classroom bore little resemblance to his lived experience of this school year.

Based at Winnipeg's Westwood Collegiate, Templeton teaches medically-advised remote learners in grade two in the mornings, and grade nine English and social studies students in the afternoon. There was no particular reason for the two cohorts to mingle, but quite by chance, the engaging and energetic Templeton found a way to build community in a most creative way: through poetry.

"As I was introducing myself at the start of the year, I noticed that many of my grade nine students were interested in what my grade two students were learning. I could almost see the eight-year-old come out in them as I explained the stories we were reading in grade two. All of this interest sparked the idea of pen pals."

The grade two students had just completed a book of poems, and were eager to share their published work. So Templeton decided to share the book with his older students on Microsoft Teams. Within two days he received roughly 30 letters from the grade nines to the grade twos.

"I spent nearly two weeks going through all the letters," he laughed. "From that moment, a constant flow of writing back and forth was started. In January, when high schools went remote for two weeks, I organized a small meet and greet. I invited



all the grade twos to join one of my English classes and the students were able to meet one another virtually. They all had questions prepared and got to put faces to the many letters they had all written.”

The students’ enthusiasm amazed Templeton.

“When we started the meeting, the first thing that anyone heard was one of my grade two students shout, ‘Look at all the people!’ It seemed to break the ice right away and put a smile on everyone’s faces.”

The warmth of connection and positive reinforcement has paid tremendous dividends for all involved, the teacher says. For both cohorts, the simple act of relating to each other provided a much-needed emotional boost during an uncertain, isolating time.

“I had high school students reflecting on their childhoods and realizing how big of an impact they made on this small group of students,” said Templeton. “From the grade two perspective, many of them were super happy to see some new faces and felt proud of the work that the older students had praised. With each of my classes facing new challenges this school year, they could relate nicely to one another, despite the vast age difference.”

**“Well after our meet and greet and into second semester, I still had students asking about the grade twos. I even have students that still ask to see the new poetry books! It has definitely been a bright spot for all students involved.”**

*- Scott Templeton, first-year teacher*

One grade nine student told Templeton that she noticed the way the younger students’ faces lit up instantly on the screen, and how she couldn’t help but smile.

“It was really special,” he said. “She reflected on the moment by realizing the common struggles all students face in the pandemic.”

Templeton was pleased and even a bit surprised by the ways in which his students engaged with the process, and

how it stuck with them.

“Well after our meet and greet and into second semester, I still had students asking about the grade twos. I even have students that still ask to see the new poetry books! It has definitely been a bright spot for all students involved.”

So, does this first-year teacher feel like he’s been hit by a freight train – repeatedly – this past year?

Absolutely not.

“I feel I’ve grown tremendously,” he said, emphatically. “As a new teacher with lots of energy and determination to make a positive impact, I’m proud of my year. I regularly reflect on how many positive things I’ve accomplished in my first year of teaching. That is my fuel for finding my next challenge as an educator.”

Turns out Templeton’s cohort of kids taught the teacher a lesson, too.

“Initially, I worried that no meaningful connection could happen between two groups of students with so many differences, but I was wrong. This experience taught me that all students have similarities, and building community is a vital part of learning. Regardless of where my teaching career takes me, I will never doubt the importance of creating community.”

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Happy Pride Month!

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# REFRESH

BY RAMAN JOB, PUBLIC RELATIONS FACILITATOR

## AGM Twitter Storm Helps Clinch Deals

Thirty-five of 38 locals came to AGM 2021 with a collective agreement that guaranteed them a contract until June, 2022.

Three didn't.

Their divisions held out, dug in their heels, and put at risk the future of 6,000 teachers' salaries with just a week left before the deadline to proclaim Bill 45.

The countdown began.

LRTA, WTA and RETTA members were in serious danger of being left on unequal footing compared to their colleagues across the province. People were talking, but nothing moved.

Until the Twitter storm hit.

At noon on Thursday, the Society asked AGM delegates, teachers from across Manitoba, and friends of public education to flood Twitter with support for locals – and challenge the remaining divisions to come to the table.

The hashtag *#fairdealforteachers* started trending Canada-wide.

"We were caught off guard a bit," says Marcela Cabezas, president of the Louis Riel Teachers' Association. "We didn't know the Society was going to do that. And it was so incredibly touching in a moment of such angst.

"In trying to move things along, we felt that momentum and support of delegates and of the Society members across the province."

The next day, Friday, May 14, the Louis Riel Teachers' Association announced an agreement-in-committee and ratified a new collective agreement the next week.

There was no word about movement in WSD or RETSD at that time, but the social media impact continued.

"It was amazing to see how it exploded," says Chris Darazi, president of the River East Transcona Teachers' Association. As RETTA president, I knew that even our members who weren't at the AGM were very impressed by



### IN SOLIDARITY FOR A FAIR DEAL

Join our social media blitz at noon in support of LRTA, RETTA and WTA

**STEP 1:** Sign into Twitter at noon.

**STEP 2:** Write a message in support of teacher colleagues without a contract. Don't forget to tag it.

*e.g., 35 have settled. Three holdouts. Come to the table! @RETSDschools @WinnipegSD @louis\_riel\_sd #fairdealforteachers*

**STEP 3:** Tweet!

*#fairdealforteachers*



that show of solidarity. We were all very happy with it. It meant a lot to us."

A week later, on Wednesday, the 19th, the River East Transcona Teachers' Association and the division reached and ratified a deal.

There was one last holdout – the Winnipeg School Division. With the passage of Bill 45 mere hours away, members across the province ramped up the pressure on social media.

To Michelle Wolfe, president of the Winnipeg Teachers' Association, the Twitter lobbying during AGM was striking. "This is what solidarity looks like, I thought. Solidarity means we stand together. We support each other through the struggle."

Finally, on the afternoon of the 20th, the Winnipeg Teachers' Association ratified a deal with the WSD.

"It really meant a lot to our members and to me personally," said Wolfe. "We came in right under the wire because hours after we ratified, Bill 45 passed."

Indeed, Bill 45 did pass that day but was not proclaimed.

Collectively, teachers around the province breathed a sigh of relief.

Now, every single MTS local was operating on a collective agreement that covered them until June, 2022.

Presidents, bargainers, members, Society staff, and teacher allies had worked extremely hard to nail down those deals. They deserve our deepest gratitude for a remarkable fight.

Will we ever know how big a factor social media played in prodding those divisions back to the table in that critical week? Not likely.

But there is no doubt that social media solidarity did have a role to play.

The platforms and users have matured. And it's now possible to organize and crowd source incredible solidarity among like-minded members who just won't give up on one another.

Social media, if used strategically, can bring laser focus to strong ideals, and help get the job done.

Thanks to everyone who took part in that powerful AGM Twitter cloud.

Know that you made a difference.

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