



Planning and staff input has been critical in re-opening of schools

Preparing for the first day of coming back to school always means considerable time devoted to planning in advance.

Then there was 2020.

Educators throughout the province, as well as the general populace, will never forget this year with schools having been closed for approximately six months due to the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Throughout the daily barrage of the latest statistics, both here in Saskatchewan and around the world, there have been the requisite number of stages of trying to re-open after the lockdown. It would not be overstating it to suggest the re-opening of schools would rank at the top in terms of the changes that needed to be incorporated—to say nothing of the trepidation of teachers, parents and families alike. There is precious little that would be as it was before.

A perfect case in point was the recent opportunity afforded to members of the media (including the *Saskatchewan Bulletin*) to tour the two adjoining, suburban Saskatoon elementary schools of Sylvia Fedoruk School (Saskatoon Public Schools) and St. Nicholas Catholic School (Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools).

Miranda Low, principal at Sylvia Fedoruk, indicated she was able to apply at least some of the lessons she learned from her previous

three-year experience as a principal in anticipation of when the two schools were officially opened to the burgeoning neighbourhood of Evergreen.

No such luck for Robyn Flaman, for whom this was a baptism by fire in her first year as principal at St. Nicholas.

“It has certainly been a busy time especially given the situation and it’s my first year as principal,” she smiled ruefully (from what I could gather from her mask-covered face) upon the conclusion of the tour. “With a new school year comes getting to see and meet the new families and students, and of course this year we were trying to make everyone aware of the many changes that we have made in order to have a safe-as-possible return to school,” Flaman said.

She candidly admitted that even with a prolonged absence from the school, this had hardly been your normal relaxing summer vacation break.

“There have been some long days for us as a staff in terms of getting ready and planning. We’ve been taking it day-by-day, and there’s been a lot of great ideas that our staff have come up with along the way,” Flaman noted.

Low concurred that since staff returned to the facility well in advance of students actually walking through the doors, “we’ve hit the ground running and the pace has been extremely high.

“As a staff, we have looked at the smallest things to make sure we’re prepared,” she said, while praising teachers for coming up with all means of innovative safeguard ideas.

“For sure a lot of this has been outside the box and it’s not what we were trained to do as teachers. But that’s what teachers do; they find solutions and respond to what they are facing by brainstorming.”

While as a member of the curious entourage, I was admittedly not sure what to expect in this new-look environment. However, it was readily apparent that from the omnipresent sanitizer bottles, the alterations in student seating arrangements and the coloured ribbons in the gymnasium so that students would only touch athletic equipment assigned to their respective cohorts, that much had been done behind the scenes during the summer months.

This is quite aside from the various mask protocols for students of varying grade levels, as well as the flags outside the parking lot (sorry muster points) where



Things look a little different in schools around the province during this COVID-19 global pandemic. This was readily apparent during a recent tour of the two adjoining elementary schools in Saskatoon: Sylvia Fedoruk from Saskatoon Public and St. Nicholas Catholic School from Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools. Aside from the ubiquitous sanitizer stations and reminders about the importance of hand washing, there were also plenty of messages posted through the schools in an effort to make students and teachers feel more comfortable with the new reality. François Rivard, Superintendent of Education for Greater Saskatoon Catholic, is shown in one of the reconfigured classrooms where social distancing is the order of the day.

students would go to meet parents or caregivers in order to maintain social distancing. These flags were also located near the boot room which they were assigned. Moreover, each class has a specific door to enter and exit for staggered recesses.

Doubtlessly you get the point. Wherever you teach in the province, it’s likely a familiar scenario, but the bottom line is nothing has seemingly been overlooked.

Both principals praised the preparatory work done at the respective school division levels, as well as their continued support throughout.

“This has given us a chance to re-look at our processes, and we have been given lots of guidance from the division level and our superintendents, which has been so helpful in working our way through this. With all the work the division had done before staff returned, we felt as prepared as we could be,” Flaman shared.

Low echoed those sentiments, saying, “we’re really grateful for the support

we have had from our division and they have been there for us from the start. They [division] had things mapped out so that as staff, our job was to just apply it so that became our focus.”

Both were also very appreciative of the extra week they had to prepare after the provincial government decided to delay the opening of schools by almost a week.

“It just gave us that extra bit of time to be more comfortable, and we used a lot of the work done by the STF [Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation] so were able to feel like things were under control and that we were on a continuum. We could focus on things like the curriculum and making sure our students were going to be looked after,” Low added.

“We know we can’t just hypothesize and that we have to put things into action, but we feel like our extra planning has been invaluable. I feel like we’re ready to go and it will be great to have our kids back. We have to be here for them,” Low added.

Flaman noted that the extra week was a blessing for her and her staff. “It allowed us to really put some things more firmly in place so that we can better anticipate situations that might come up, which I’m sure they will. The way we have framed it is that we’re here to support one another through this and to provide help if someone needs time if they are feeling overwhelmed.

“We know there are going to be challenges that have to be overcome, but that’s the reality. People are definitely feeling anxious, but I’m proud of our staff and they have shown great resilience right from the start.

“We’ve also tried to be very mindful of reaching out to visit families and students to try to reassure them. It’s important that we believe in what we have done in terms of planning and taking precautions,” Flaman added in, using the words of author, Jody Carrington.

“We are all here walking each other home,” she said, adding that the phrase has a home in her office. ■

Carrington pays tribute to important role of teachers while advocating for change

Admittedly, I have not met that many child psychologists in my time, but suffice to say Jody Carrington would never fit the stereotype a person might have.

As the keynote presenter at this year's abridged Saskatoon Teachers' Association Convention (most were still watching virtually from their respective schools), there was a cohort of STA executive members, a few politicians and board personnel in actual attendance.

They were taken on an emotional journey, as Carrington is one of those gifted individuals who can take her audience from spontaneous laughter to the verge of tears seamlessly but purposefully. Her unscripted, highly engaging style was probably in many ways just what the educators needed to hear just prior to returning to classrooms.

It was very much a self-effacing, at times profanity-laced presentation, but always with a purpose in mind—albeit that it seemed unscripted. Carrington, however, was most adroit at knowing when to underscore her key messages in focusing on emotional regulation.

"We are all here walking each other home," she said in one of her most poignant observations. "Kids need someone to talk them through this, and we will all be alright if we pay attention to the importance of connection and don't take anything for granted."

Carrington's approach is to not only focus on the students, but equally on how critical it is for teachers to reach out to admittedly anxiety-filled parents in order to get them on board.

She often came back to the importance of relationships and connections, while maintaining that in her view "kids are the least of our worries. It's about looking after yourselves because you're tasked with our most important commodity—our babies. If you're not OK, they [students] don't stand a chance," she said, while underscoring to the teachers that "you are heroes."

Carrington spoke of the importance of attributes like kindness, grace, feeling it, allowing room for kids to have joy and fun and to be cognizant of the importance of eye contact (with students and parents alike as a sense of reassurance).

Alluding to her first book, *Kids These Days: A Game Plan for (Re)connecting With*



Jody Carrington's highly animated story contained a strong message of support for teachers at Saskatoon Teachers' Association Convention.

Those We Teach, Lead, & Love, Carrington reminded those in the audience—in person and virtually—that as teachers, they have the kids for a longer period of time during the waking hours than parents.

"It's about looking after yourselves because you're tasked with our most important commodity—our babies. If you're not OK, they [students] don't stand a chance."

Jody Carrington

In an interview afterwards, Carrington said her approach to these engagements has not changed that much even in this time of the COVID-19 global pandemic.

"One thing that hasn't changed is how it still comes back to connection and that's at the heart of what it is teachers do every day. Sure, it's going to be harder and you have to be brave because nobody knows how this will end. But you have to run with it and trust your instincts. Your skill set has you wired to do this.

"Just look at when schools closed and how you handled the change to digital learning. You showed up every day and you stepped in with your whole heart. That's what educators are

going to do because they love their jobs and their kids."

Carrington said she is bemused how the general public hasn't noticed the incredible job teachers have done previously and particularly in the current situation.

"We need to acknowledge the role of teachers; they are the ones with their eyes on our babies every day. So let's empower them in any way we can as a society," she said in the interview portion.

Calling for a more meaningful merging of health and education, Carrington decried that there isn't an informed plan in schools when it comes to dealing with mental health issues.

"There is a huge disconnect there. We need to acknowledge this and there needs to be a seat at the table for the clinical aspect. It doesn't need to be specific necessarily, but we have to acknowledge there is a gap and it's not a question of if but when a need arises. We need to have a solid plan in place."

According to Carrington, she is convinced that, anxieties aside, teachers very much want to return to their classrooms.

"They love their job and so let's just slow things down a bit and remember the emotional regulation. We will never forget the 2020-21 year in education, and you will remember every student and family that crosses your path. Remind yourself why you got into this to start with and you can change the trajectory for students and you will rise to the occasion," she said in her de facto role as cheerleader for the day. ■

RESOURCE CONNECTIONS



Building positive relationships

By Joan Elliott, Librarian/Manager
Emma Stewart Resources Centre

Building positive relationships with students and staff is a fundamental principle of the teaching profession, one that is even more important in these challenging pandemic times. Whether you are in a face-to-face school environment or teaching virtually, those who feel supported by caring connections with educators and peers feel a sense of belonging that can lead to a successful school year.

Several new books focus on reaching the minds of students through their hearts. Neila A. Connors in her book *If You Don't F.E.E.D. the Students They S.T.A.R.V.E.: Improving Attitude and Achievement Through Positive Relationships*, states the following: "If students don't feel that the adults they are working with truly care—learning does not occur." Her F.E.E.D. model highlights ways of fueling, engaging, and empowering students on a daily basis. Specific strategies for helping students feel welcome and valued through fostering dignity and respect, relationships, care and compassion, and wellness are outlined in the first chapter.

In *Teach Your Class Off: The Real Rap Guide to Teaching*, high school teacher CJ Reynolds asserts that "relationships are king" and the stories he shares about his teaching experiences reveal that he does whatever he can to connect with every student to make them feel special. He establishes trusting relationships by paying close attention to them to let them know that they are seen and heard. He also builds connections by teaching through lenses that kids care about such as pop culture and real-world learning.

Positive peer relationships are also vital for student success and for building a caring culture. In *The Collaborative Classroom: Teaching Students How to Work Together Now and for the Rest of Their Lives*, Trevor Muir argues that schools should place more emphasis on a collaborative approach to learning. He acknowledges that teaching meaningful group work is difficult and provides practical steps for creating a collaborative culture, teaching students to rely on themselves and others, creating effective groups and assessing collaboration.

Ensouling Our Schools: A Universally Designed Framework for Mental Health, Well-Being, and Reconciliation by Jennifer Katz and Kevin Lamoureux, is replete with strategies for building relationships and a sense of belonging. *The Circle of Courage Framework* by Martin Brokenleg is central to their approach.

A book focused on positive student-teacher and student-teacher relationships in digital and online environments is *Chart a New Course: A Guide to Teaching Essential Skills for Tomorrow's World* by Rachelle Dene Poth. She notes that a virtual space must be created to promote a sense of connectedness and that relationship building and social emotional learning are key aspects of a nurturing classroom culture and for helping students be prepared for the future. Icebreakers, student-created activities, game-based learning, digital breakouts and scavenger hunts are a few of the methods she suggests for building student relationships and collaboration.

Other authors discuss the importance of positive relationships among educators. Fred Ende and Meghan Everette in *Forces of Influence: How Educators Can Leverage Relationships to Improve Practice*, state that good relationships are paramount in schools and they emphasize that four essential keys to relationship building are listening, trust, respect and collaboration. Numerous templates, role-plays, reflective questions and self-assessments are included.

Relational Leadership in Education: A Phenomenon of Inquiry and Practice by David L. Giles, which is based on his phenomenological research program, underscores the centrality of relationships in living, educating and leading. It is organized by themes such as relational leadership sensibilities, organizational culture, professional development, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

Creating caring relationships will reap rewards for all in the school community.

To borrow these resources, please email stf@stf.sk.ca or call 1-800-667-7762. ■

STF advises members to suspend volunteering for extracurricular activities

In an effort to support school divisions' work to protect the health of students, teachers and staff, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation is advising its members not to volunteer for extracurricular activities.

"Our priority as teachers and community leaders is to ensure the safety of our students as our schools re-open," said

Patrick Maze, President of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. "Significant effort has been undertaken to ensure safety of students such as cohorting, restricting travel and staggered start times. Providing extracurricular activities undermine these efforts."

The decision of whether or not to proceed with such

activities this school year has been left to the discretion of each school division. Teacher participation in extracurricular activities is strictly voluntary.

"It's important to remember that when Saskatchewan students return to their classrooms on September 8, they will not have been in a classroom

for over five months. Gaps in learning already exist at the beginning of a normal school year, and COVID-19 is only going to widen those gaps," said Maze. "While we recognize the important role that extracurricular activities can have on students' well-being, our priority has to be on their safety and education."

As teachers, students and their families navigate the transition into the school year, suspending participation in extracurricular activities for the time being will allow everyone to focus on safety and education as they adjust to the protective measures the school divisions have put in place. ■

Education issues sure to be major election topic this fall

As we move inexorably closer to the October 26 provincial election, it has become crystal clear that K-12 public education has surfaced as a major issue for both the ruling Saskatchewan Party and the Opposition NDP to ponder.

With that in mind, the *Saskatchewan Bulletin* is publishing the comments of Education Minister Gord Wyant and Education Critic Carla Beck on a select few questions. These focused on the importance of class size and complexity, the inequity when it comes to digital access, the all but moribund philosophy of School^{PLUS} and their respective visions for the future of public education.

While such conversations will inevitably become partisan in courting public opinion, there are some similarities that also came to light—albeit this depends on whether you are in the seat of power and trying to take credit or from the Opposition perspective questioning the current policies.

Both politicians praised the early days of classes returning to school for the fall, with Wyant citing extraordinary work and collaboration as the main reason.

“It has brought into sharp focus the importance of the relationships we have within the education sector, and we wouldn’t be where we are without that cooperation.”

Wyant readily conceded he has heard first-hand some of the legitimate concerns, but he remains steadfast that returning to school is critical.

“... the education sector has done a good job of managing to find a balance, and we just know this has to work because education is so important for the province as a whole.”

Carla Beck

“Kids need to be back in school for a whole bunch of reasons,” he said, citing mental health and socialization as two key factors, which he suggested have suffered while adapting to online learning.

Beck, meanwhile, suggested those traditionally collaborative relationships have been strained in recent years due to lack of funding for public education. She noted though “that the education sector has done a good job of managing to find a balance, and we just know this has to work because education is so important for the province as a whole.”

Class Size and Complexity

Beck noted that in talking to teachers recently, the rotational days with smaller class sizes has reinforced the importance of smaller class sizes. “In conversation with this teacher, she said

it reminded her of how she was able to devote time and attention for the individual child.

“It’s just part of the issue. We need portables in a timely fashion because the issues aren’t going to go away when the provincial government has not funded for [enrolment] growth. This is an issue that has been at the forefront for a number of years. We used to measure and track class size and complexity. This is hampering the ability of teachers to do their job and impacting the education to our students that they deserve.

“It’s also a matter of public safety when you see the number of schools that have over 100 percent capacity. It all lends to the sense of urgency.”

“Class size and complexity is also a matter of public safety when you see the number of schools that have over 100 percent capacity. It all lends to the sense of urgency.”

Carla Beck

Wyant, for his part, said for both his party and personally, there is an acute acknowledgment that this is a major issue. He remains hopeful that the Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation’s eventual willingness to participate in the provincial committee on class size and composition will auger well for the future.

“Certainly this pandemic has brought the issue into sharper focus, and we need to continue to work on these issues at the committee levels. I thought we were starting to see some good work in this area when the pandemic hit,” Wyant said.

He also alluded to the recent spate of new school announcements as a way of reducing class size by having additional space available.

“Overall there’s no question we have to focus on this very important and complex issue in the future,” Wyant noted.

Digital Access

Wyant acknowledged there is a genuine issue here when it comes to reliable, high-speed internet access in areas of the province.

“We’ve seen some very inventive solutions already and we need to come up with more. The importance of having that access across the province is critical and how we support broadband accessibility and getting easier access to the internet is a priority. We need to expand those services and it’s top of mind.

“We need to work on this not only from an education standpoint but also for the economic perspective. Hopefully we are establishing a knowledge base in this regard.”



Carla Beck, Education Critic



Gord Wyant, Saskatchewan Education Minister

Beck agreed with her counterpart that the pandemic brought into sharp focus the inequities that exist.

“We’ve seen first-hand the digital divide. It’s down to economics in some cases, but also access. It’s a rural and urban divide and a north and south divide. We’ve been talking about this for a long time.

“The importance of having that access across the province is critical and how we support broadband accessibility and getting easier access to the internet is a priority.”

Gord Wyant

“We don’t have a crystal ball and so we don’t know to what extent we will have to rely on digital learning in the future, but we need to be prepared to make the transition more seamlessly if we need to. Sadly in most cases, it’s the students facing the economic barriers that stand to lose the most and the divide is in danger of being exacerbated. That’s going to show up in the classroom,” Beck offered.

School^{PLUS}

Wyant insisted there have been ongoing conversations with other ministries, characterizing them as making some progress.

“Again, with the pandemic we’ve seen the mental health issues, for example, coming more to the fore. It’s an example of how we need to cooperate and more work needs to be done. Too often the ministries have not talked to each other, and we need to break those silos and make sure we have a cooperative approach. The whole idea is a good one and it continues to be a priority.

“I think some of the elements can for sure happen in terms of supporting the whole child. We have to find ways to work within the parameters of the budget so that we can deliver services in a more

economical way because there is only one taxpayer.”

Beck recalls her early days as a social worker when the School^{PLUS} notion was first introduced, recalling how it “just made so much sense for students and families.

“The question is how do we do this in an integrated way to meet families where they are at. It’s a good economic policy as well if it’s done creatively and collaboratively.

“It takes political will and being prepared to give up some turf. The potential benefits are unmistakable and it will take some re-allocation of capital, but we can’t keep piling everything on the schools.”

Education and Economics

Beck reiterated earlier comments that education needs to be viewed as an investment in the future, and to forego the one-year budgetary cycle or four-year election term thinking.

“...our financial commitment to public education has been significant, and the importance of schools is also very much an economic portfolio in terms of the opportunities it provides for our young people to be successful and participate in the provincial economy.”

Gord Wyant

“We need to make sure our students have the skills they will need in order to succeed and for that to happen, we need to ensure teachers are able to use their expertise to bring out the best in each of those students. We need to allow teachers to be professionals and yes, to meet outcomes but not to be burdened by a lot of extra paperwork.”

Wyant noted the record investment in the education

system in the last provincial budget as an indication that the government is well aware of the importance of public education.

“I think it would be fair to say our financial commitment to public education has been significant, and the importance of schools is also very much an economic portfolio in terms of the opportunities it provides for our young people to be successful and participate in the provincial economy.”

Future Education Perspective

Wyant chose to underscore the importance of cooperation, referencing the recent Education Sector Response Planning Team’s integral role in the time of the pandemic as a signpost.

“We need to continue to build on that because we all have the interest of children as the first priority. I’m hopeful that some of the signs of cooperation we have seen are indicative of more of the same in the future because the importance of relationships is critical.

“There are certainly some issues we will disagree on, but we continue to build on our vision. It’s a big ship to turn, but I still believe we have one of the best education systems in the country. We need to continue to evolve because education is the key to everything we do.”

Beck stressed her belief that local school boards need to be empowered to have the decision-making criteria to make their own situations work.

“We have a complicated history of Indigenous and Métis people in our system. We need to seize the opportunity to address that so we can walk together by removing those gaps that have existed so that all students can realize their potential. The current gap in terms of educational attainment is indefensible. It’s definitely had an economic impact, but it’s also a moral imperative and the right thing to do.

“I don’t think any one of us has all the answers, but it’s important we have the right goals and vision and then being courageous enough to let it happen,” she emphasized. ■

Being back in the classroom brings joy to teachers mixed with considerable stress

By Shayna Zubko, Teacher,
Esterhazy Central High School

As teachers have come back into the classroom, it has allowed me time to reflect on what it means to be back in the classroom. It has been a complete whirlwind of activity that has left many of us feeling overwhelmed, confused, stressed and just plain tired.

The extra week before classes resumed was, in the end, a blessing in disguise as there was so much information to process, consider and trample through—much like an Amazonian jungle. It has left me considering the rules, stress, funding, the needs of our facilities and our personal well-being.

The rules and restrictions placed on us as teachers and students was a given. We knew that in order to be back in the classroom, something would have to change. Although changing everything from our yearly, weekly and daily schedules and routines seems like creating pure chaos, in the end it is for the better for everyone's health and safety. Whether you have changed to a block system, or cohorts or some other program of remote/digital, synchronous or asynchronous teaching, the worry still becomes that teachers are going to burn themselves out.

The prep work required to be back in the classroom with students has added more to the plates of teachers. The extra work has resulted in extra stress. On a daily basis our minds are forever going to be bouncing between the concept of school being back and worrying about masks, face shields, transitions, extracurriculars, reducing student contact, contact tracing, rearranging furniture in classrooms, no lockers, students following rules, enforcing the rules and getting kick back, technology needs, facility needs and then asking a million times, "Wait—can we do that?"

Let's be honest, there are so many questions still! Every time a student asks a question, even as simple as, "Can I go to the bathroom?" we have to stop, evaluate and then answer the question, because it is no longer a simple response.



Shayna Zubko, while happy to be back with her students at Esterhazy Central High School, readily acknowledged feeling overwhelmed and stressed during the first days of schools re-opening.

The startup for this school year has been hard. It has resulted in sleep loss, extra hours of planning while reworking curriculum and lessons, and sweat and tears. The toll has been both emotional and physical. But in the end, I am so happy to be back in the classroom. It brought me such joy to see students cracking jokes and interacting with one another. It is for the overall well-being of our students that our schools are operational since we provide so many supports to our students that they have not had access to in the last six months.

Funding education has been something that has been commonplace in the media as of late. I wish it were common knowledge how little of the funding is coming down the pipe and directly into the classroom. It has been frustrating to watch since there is a general shortage of personal protective equipment and hand sanitizer in the province, yet we literally need these things to be open and operational on a daily basis.

Or try having to teach a class via distance learning

within your own building just because students from two different grades are taking the same class and the Wi-Fi and network cannot sustain you holding live virtual lessons. The lack of technology should not fall on the school divisions or the shoulders of parents. In fact, many parents cannot bare this burden. Period.

A co-worker of mine said, "teachers are not afraid of work." That is so true! The problem with that statement is that because we are not afraid of work, we are willing to often go the extra mile and make it work more so for our students than for ourselves. As teachers we need to remember the old adage; if you don't fill your cup, you cannot fill others either. In the end, face shields and masks are the least of our worries. We will put our focus into making sure our students have what they need.

We are still facing the unknown, much like we were at the beginning of this pandemic, and just like then, we will continue to roll with the punches and do what we do best—teach. ■

Returning to school: A kindergarten teacher's perspective

By Erica Bronkhurst, Teacher,
Saskatoon French School

There are many mixed emotions as I think about returning to my kindergarten classroom this fall. I am happy that kids will be back in a structured environment and get to see their friends again. I am excited that I will be teaching again because I love my job.

However, I am disheartened that so many students will be squished into a room, wall-to-wall. I am worried when I hear that masks are not mandatory for students from kindergarten to Grade 3. Why am I, and many of my colleagues, being put at risk while other teachers are not?

When I came back to the school last week with only 20 kindergarten students registered, I was in a panic that I might be teaching 20 students in one room, not wearing masks, and trying to make this all work in a play-based classroom. How does that even work?

The hardest part for me has been the constant unknowns and uncertainties. We have all been playing the waiting game for so long. A big part of my kindergarten programming is taking preventative measures; having well thought out routines for my young students to follow is essential for their well-being at school. How can I

carefully plan for their day, when I do not know what I am being asked to do?

It is exhausting being reactive to oncoming problems instead of taking a preventative approach. I feel like I keep being asked to be patient, but answers come too late with little time to prepare. It really does feel like we are building an airplane while in the air. Fortunately, we were granted an extra week to better organize for the upcoming school year and, for me, this has greatly helped my classroom be ready for students. Without this extra time for preparation, schools, in my opinion, would not have been a safe place.

EDITORIAL



Money is only a part of the real issue

It would hardly qualify as an anniversary to celebrate, but rather one that only tends to remind one of the lost opportunities in the past two decades.

Yes folks, I'm talking about it is fast approaching 20 years since Dr. Michael Tymchak, then the Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina, shared the findings of the exhaustive Role of the School Task Force Report which led to the notion of School^{PLUS} and was envisioned as the ultimate integrated support system.

Quite logically and laudably, the aim was to incorporate social services, justice and health into working in tandem with education with the school to serve as the community hub. It sounded so good when they called the news conference.

Spoiler alert—I was actually in attendance at the unveiling. I don't really care if that dates me; the real lingering issue for me is how many faces I have seen pass through the public education landscape in the past two decades who have all (to varying degrees) espoused their support for the concept. Yet, here we are nearly TWENTY years later and it remains a great rallying cry—as you can see elsewhere in this publication—as Education Minister Gord Wyant and Education Critic Carla Beck both fervently support the idea with hopes for the future.

I recall former Premier Brad Wall indicating to me in conversation that the concept had considerable merit, but had never been properly resourced.

That's undeniable and it's been a recurring theme with the common thread that the major issue is the inability or unwillingness for the different government ministries to look beyond the silos. If I had just made a record of how often I have heard that rhetoric, it would fill an edition of the *Saskatchewan Bulletin* by itself.

Back in the day when this was still the newest and shiniest idea, words such as optimism and opportunity were frequently part of the conversation as well as underscoring the need to be collaborative.

You will see the same words being used by the folks who are in the political realm now, and I believe they are sincere enough. But if you ask me, I would say there is a fundamental reason this vision has never taken hold—aside from the obvious lack of capital investment.

In my view there's a real disconnect, subtle as it may be, that has endured through all these years. Yes, the decision makers (and those who would be decision makers if the electorate decided to try a new direction) publicly state the importance of public education in terms of how beneficial it is to the economics of the province: both current and long term.

The problem though is that funding education for the overall populace tends to be words only for the very simple reason that the whole K-12 (and beyond) education is always seen as a means to an end. Furthermore, for all the talk about education being for everyone, that just rings hollow.

The rub is that the majority of us and our children will be sufficiently well served by the education system as it is and the end goal will be realized. Translated that means there is a generational unwillingness to pour untold millions into trying to give the students at the lowest ebb a legitimate chance to level the playing field.

Of course, money will always play a factor in an all-encompassing initiative like School^{PLUS}, but the sad reality is there is an unspoken commitment among the more favoured members of the citizenry to look after their own. Call it reality, or more cryptically perhaps, School Minus. ■

SASKATCHEWAN BULLETIN

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As a school, we are making the best of a bad situation. I am at the point now where I feel like everything is slowly coming together. My classroom is ready, I understand our school safety protocols and I have a staff that is supportive of one another. I am very lucky to be in a school where my staff is my family. I know we have

each other's backs and we know we are in this together. These last two weeks we have laughed together, cried together and have thought of some amazing ideas to keep our students safe. For now, we will continue to wait and see how September goes. Part of me is scared, but I know I must be optimistic for my kindergartners. ■



Muster points and sanitizing have become par for the course as schools re-open. This was evident at École Lakeview School, a K-8 school in Saskatoon Public School Division. Shelley Branstetter (top and bottom right) is shown with the Grade 3 French immersion class as they first gather together and then later sanitizing upon entering the school. Annie Schubert, and her masked-up Grade 2 students, were waiting for a couple more students in their cohort prior to going through the same process as her colleagues and their students.



With or without extra fanfare, World Teachers' Day is something to celebrate

Given the extraordinary times we are all experiencing these days due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, this year's World Teachers' Day will probably pass by in relative anonymity.

Particularly so when compared to the success of the previous year when thousands gathered at the Saskatchewan legislature building to celebrate the profession, while simultaneously bringing attention to some of the challenges in the public education sector.

This, however, should in no way be interpreted as a slight against teachers and the crucial role they play—arguably more so during these times as schools strive for some sort of normalcy after a prolonged six-month closure.

If there was a silver lining to the whole scenario around students learning online, it would be that at no point have parents ever had a better up-close-and-personal opportunity to see what their children's daily learning might look like, albeit in a significantly altered environment.

Those parents who genuinely observed the digital connection between their children and teachers have in all likelihood gained a new appreciation for the role of classroom teachers in the delivery of education to their children.

So even if October 5 (World Teachers' Day) is without the fanfare, it would still be an appropriate time for

educators and parents alike to contemplate for a moment the importance of that oft-repeated phrase—celebrating the teacher and student relationship.

As is often the case, there is an extra sense of legitimacy to the words of someone who is not involved in the process as a member of the teaching profession. The words of then Grade 12 student Merah Gasmó at last year's celebrations ring true loud and clear when she alluded to how teachers “light a fire within their students” while describing them as her own super heroes.

This eloquently delivered speech by this aspiring teacher (Gasmó) succinctly captures that critical role teachers can play as not only educators but also as inspirational mentors to their students.

Gasmó, who attended high school in Regina, summed it up perfectly when contemplating her own future by emphasizing that “I want the opportunity to support students the way my teachers have supported me.”

From my personal journalistic wanderings throughout the province, having had the privilege to interview numerous of Saskatchewan's 13,500 teachers, I can verify the often unspoken examples of what it is that Gasmó refers to when it comes to the support factor. Often it might not even be conveyed via a conversation but simply a gesture of mutual respect.

Just as often, you witness it when having strictly off-the-record conversations with teachers. Their experiences may vary considerably just as their locales, but the common theme among the vast majority of those who have chosen teaching as their profession is how deeply they care about their students.

This is not just in the classrooms as I have witnessed numerous episodes of their genuine worry and concern for some of their more vulnerable students away from the school setting.

If you are going to be a teacher, there is no way you can approach this in a half-hearted manner.

I'm reminded of a phrase used by Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Vice-President Samantha Becotte at the aforementioned Regina event when she spoke of how “I am mom to two young kids who are just beginning their public education, and both teachers and parents share a common interest: we all want what is best for our kids.”

That sums it up; and it is more than ample reason to take a moment to reflect on what it means to be a teacher and why their contributions should wholeheartedly be appreciated every day, but particularly on October 5.

While it might be a global event often highlighting some of the genuine hardships teachers in other countries grapple with, it is every bit as important to celebrate the profession here in our own backyard as well. ■

Women in leadership – A McDowell research project

By Amy Orth, Principal, Aberdeen Composite and Amy Korver, Vice-Principal, Delisle Elementary

For the past year, we have been immersed in a McDowell research project focused on the experiences of female educational leaders in Saskatchewan.

As two administrators midway through our careers, we have had several common experiences and wonderings that led us to explore this topic more thoroughly. Over six months we interviewed nine current female school and division-based administrators and focused on the following questions:

- What are the experiences of female educational leaders in Prairie Spirit School Division and Prairie South School Division?

- What challenges or barriers have they encountered in their leadership journeys?

- How do they perceive their impact on school culture?

Our work surfaced several important ideas about women's experiences. Most of the women did not aim to become administrators early in their career but were shoulder tapped many times before moving into formal administrative positions. The women had been learning leaders; they had held learning support roles, been involved in committee work and had often acted as mentors to others.

All participants indicated the importance of key relationships with mentors early in their career. Additionally, family considerations, including when to enter administration roles; whether or not they could parent and principal concurrently; and the need to care for aging parents played significantly into women's career choices.

Throughout their careers, the women faced explicit and implicit gender discrimination from colleagues, parents and students. In some cases, this included sexual and aggressive language directed towards them. Additionally, the women identified their perception of networks focused around sports that they benefited from early in their career (such as coaching leading to leadership experience). However, they felt that this experience did not translate as easily to specific jobs as it did for others. One participant aptly stated, “It didn't feel like an old boys' club until I wanted in.”

With regard to school culture, many women felt that they were able to lead schools and organizations through significant changes related to realigning policy and procedures when it required difficult conversations and challenging staff and community expectations.

It was clear that the women we interviewed used intentional strategies to build relationships with their colleagues, which

often led to relational trust with staff. Many women described a keen awareness of the big picture in their schools knowing who needed what in order to orchestrate a larger goal. The women's leadership style seemed to be matriarchal in nature. They all mentioned the need to look after students and make them feel known; they described a seemingly primal need to fight for students who they felt were mistreated in the educational system.

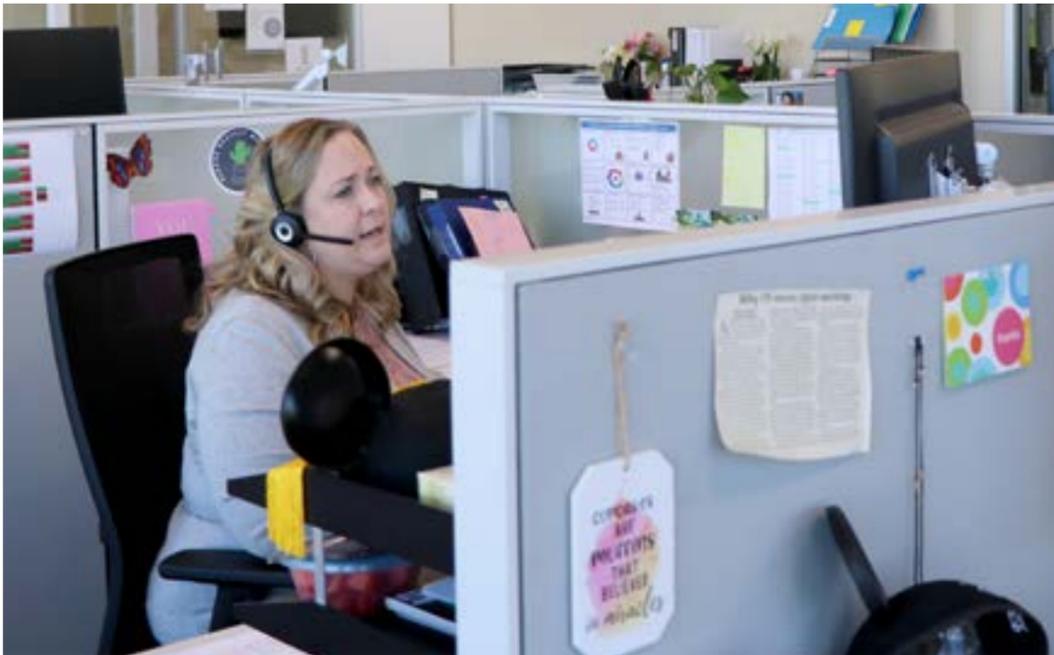
As leaders, the women were comfortable being vulnerable in their work knowing that answers and solutions came through collaboration. At the same time, a consistent theme was the necessity of providing tough feedback but doing so in a way that maintained dignity and moved the organization forward. Finally, all the women described a focus on continuous learning improvement; they focused on making their schools or divisions better and not necessarily on their own career trajectory.

The study highlights the experiences and challenges of nine women. They had been learning leaders; they had held learning support roles, been involved in committee work and had often acted as mentors to others. All participants indicated the importance of key relationships with mentors early in their career.

Our study concludes with three recommendations. First, organizations should take steps to determine if there are specific informal networks in their organization that are perceived to have influence and power. Second, organizations should seek to facilitate informal and formal mentorship opportunities that lead to growth for young women. Third, all teachers need to recognize that education has roots in patriarchy and we need to be proactive in dismantling traditional norms and expectations.

While our study is not representative of all female leaders, it does highlight the experiences and challenges of nine women. We hope that it starts a conversation that encourages more women to pursue leadership in our province. ■

STF launches Member Support Centre



Andrea Minto is one of those who are employed in the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation new Member Support Centre that is now open, and will act as a person's first point of contact upon calling or emailing the Federation.

The product of two years of research, planning and testing, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation launched its new Member Support Centre on August 31. The MSC will act as a person's first point of contact upon calling or emailing the Federation.

The idea for the Member Support Centre stemmed from feedback the Federation received in the 2018 Member Survey, where 36 percent of members identified areas for improvement including reductions in response wait times, call bounces and transfers required to get a response. With the implementation of the MSC, members will receive dedicated support from the beginning of their request to resolution.

There have been several phases and milestones that have led to the launch of the Centre. Once plans were developed as to what the Federation wanted the MSC to look like, one of the big components was figuring out the technology that would support the Centre's work. This included tools for

new case management, call tracking, and an upcoming online chat feature.

With the implementation of the MSC, members will receive dedicated support from the beginning of their request to resolution. The Centre brought on five representatives who are dedicated to working with members to find answers to their requests.

Training was also a large part of the work leading up to the launch of the Member Support Centre. The Centre brought on five representatives who are dedicated to working with

members to find answers to their requests. The representatives were certified by the STF Member Services Training Program in an effort to minimize how often a member is transferred. In addition, the Federation developed a member service-training program that prepared staff in building a quality service experience.

While testing was part of the training process, the Member Support Centre went through a soft-launch period in the two and a half weeks leading up to the official launch. This period allowed the MSC representatives and leadership, as well as other Federation units involved, the opportunity to polish the processes they had developed to ensure they matched the needs of Federation members.

To contact the Member Support Centre, you can call the Federation at 306-373-1660 or toll free at 1-800-667-7762, or by email at stf@stf.sk.ca. You can also keep watching for the upcoming online chat feature on the Federation website, which will be available during regular business hours. ■

Pathways acquires more resources for the Emma Stewart Resources Centre

Exploring the Many Pathways to Learning is a contracted service that the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation provides to the Ministry of Education that involves teachers in a process to evaluate resources to support specific curricula.

Resource recommendations by teacher-evaluators are collated and submitted to the Ministry for final approval as core or additional resources before they are listed on the resource pages of the Ministry's curriculum website. Currently, there are over 3,500 recommended resources housed at the Emma Stewart Resources Centre that are available for teachers to borrow.

Teachers who evaluate resources have stated that one of the advantages to their involvement with Pathways has been the first-hand exposure to newer resources.

Another inherent advantage for evaluators is the increased ease of familiarity with the curriculum that comes by exploring how the resources

align to the learning outcomes. The greatest benefit to all teachers is that every physical resource, once approved as a core or additional resource, is available for borrowing from the Emma Stewart Resources Centre by clicking the borrow link found in the majority of

the resources records posted on the Ministry of Education's curriculum website at www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca.

Professionals from school divisions have the opportunity to borrow the resources in order to conduct their own selection processes and teachers looking to



INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP



Picture This!

Using a metaphor to describe educational leadership is not necessarily a new idea. Most of us can recall comparing school leaders to an orchestra conductor, a gardener or a parent in our university graduate classes.

A metaphor, aptly stated, is powerful. Novelist Stephen King says that metaphors enable us to "see an old thing in a new and vivid way." We use metaphors to process the unfamiliar. A well-placed metaphor enables us to connect and look at, and make sense of, new information and experiences with something familiar. Researchers Maguire and Braun (2019) tell us that metaphors can offer a new way of thinking about leadership and that school leaders in particular use metaphors to paint a story as they process and envision changing and anxious times.

If true, the stories this year will be interesting.

In a 2018 study about how principals made sense of their roles during a period of significant education reform in Israel, researchers invited principals to use metaphors to describe their leadership role as they worked to balance multiple and ever-changing external demands with their personal and the school's internal goals and commitments. Their stories, or metaphors, helped them to navigate a time of "profound disruption" to their role and their work.

The researchers found that sense making was a key leadership capability and that principals came up with some very creative metaphors to make sense of unfamiliar situations and complex concepts. For the principals, these "symbolically encoded representations" created new ways of seeing and interpreting reality and subsequently influenced their leadership actions/responses.

The study found that the leadership metaphors emerged across three themes: the leader's role, their work and their relationship with teachers. As you imagine and reflect on your own role, your work and your relationships, some of their images may resonate and perhaps bring a smile.

- A marionette or puppet—feeling little or no control as external bodies and agencies determine priorities and make decisions.
- A Swiss watch—surrounded by efficiencies and timelines...tick tock...tick tock....
- An octopus—attempting to manage multiple tasks simultaneously; not dropping the ball.
- A key—opening doors, envisioning new opportunities and ways of doing things.
- A magician—transforming the demands of reality into something that just might work for the school.
- The punk rock star—challenging and defying established assumptions, priorities and power dynamics.
- A pressure valve—invaluable for letting off steam and regaining equilibrium.
- A spider—constantly spinning a web, creating strong connections that support students, the school and the community.
- An air traffic controller—reacting quickly, responsible for making critical decisions on the spot.
- A Cheshire cat—a deliberate, crafty and skilled communicator knowing when to appear and when to disappear, when to direct and when to question or empower.
- A touchstone—the standard-bearer and institutional and moral anchor for the school community.

Metaphors enable us to not only link our current context, be it unknown or uncertain, to something grounded in the familiar, but also to condense this reality to a fleeting image of something tangible—reflecting our values and personal beliefs about our role, our work and our relationships.

Metaphors are also personal and enable us to reflect. Your turn—what's your story? ■

supplement their resources may contact the Emma Stewart Resources Centre to request items. Loaned resources are mailed free of charge and a postage-paid return label is included with every parcel.

The updated list of English and French curricula included in the evaluation process can be viewed by clicking on Pathways to Learning in the Quick Links of the Federation website at www.stf.sk.ca. Most recently, some of the practical and applied arts curricula and

high school arts education courses were added in both English and French.

Resources were also acquired to evaluate for Dene 10, 20, 30; Nakawē 10, 20, 30; Michif 10, 20, 30; and nēhiyawēwin 10, 20, 30. Teachers interested in becoming Pathways evaluators can access the online application form. As more curricula are renewed by the Ministry, Pathways will continue to expand its purview and acquire more resources for the evaluation process. ■

New agreement supports enhanced environmental education in public schools

By Victoria Dinh,
Communications & Media
Relations Coordinator,
University of Saskatchewan

SASKATOON—Saskatoon Public Schools and the Sustainability and Education Policy Network at the University of Saskatchewan have signed a memorandum of understanding to further sustainability and climate change education initiatives.

The new agreement supports sustainability and climate change education for SPS administrators and teachers. It includes the development of programming that helps K-12 students gain knowledge and be active in sustainable living, engaged citizenship and well-being. SPS and SEPN will also collaborate on opportunities for sustainability and climate change-related research.

“As a public school division, our role is to support our entire community, which includes developing the next generation of citizens

who will contribute to it,” said Saskatoon Public Schools board chairperson Colleen MacPherson. “This partnership with SEPN will present our students with valuable learning about the environment, but also actively engage them in being citizens and understanding their role both locally and globally. This type of learning is not only significant for the students, but also for our community.”

The path to the MOU began in the fall of 2019 as a response to student interest in the Global Climate Strike demonstrations. This led to discussions between Saskatoon Public Schools and Marcia McKenzie, director of SEPN and professor in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan.

“SPS was enthusiastic about the idea of working together to help engage teachers and students in inquiry-based education that strives for climate action,” said McKenzie. “Today’s youth are very aware of the climate

crisis and they would like to see their teachers, their schools and the school division engaged in leadership on the environment as well.”

In January, SPS and SEPN held professional learning opportunities for teachers interested in environmental education and effective ways classroom learning can respond. The content was based on SEPN’s multi-year international research examining effective education policy and practice in sustainability.

“With the help of SEPN, we have initiated a strategic and long-term commitment to climate change education in the school division,” said Saskatoon Public Schools Superintendent of Education Dave Derksen. “Our school division has established a climate change educators’ network and we are committed to developing students as young citizens ready to take on this complex issue with courage, compassion and creativity. With SEPN’s help

we will sustain these efforts and study the impact.”

Researchers with SEPN have been engaged in climate change education initiatives since 2011, and in early June received a \$2.5-million grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to advance climate change education on an international scale.

“We’ve found that while the field of climate change education is still new, research suggests good climate change education needs to include focus on the social and emotional aspects of learning about climate change. School divisions can show leadership by embedding sustainability not only in teaching and learning,

but also through reducing the environmental footprint of their buildings and operations, community partnerships and overall governance priorities,” said McKenzie.

For the students concerned with climate change and its impacts on their generation and generations to come, this MOU is a step in the right direction.

“We hope this will lead to actual changes in our schools, not just learning what climate change is,” said Helena Blenkinsop and Vaeda Bly, Grade 8 SPS students. “We want to hear our teachers say, ‘We’re going to tell you about this issue and we’re also going to tell you what we’re doing about it as a school.’” ■

Dene, Michif early learning programs to be introduced

SASKATCHEWAN MÉTIS NATION—Saskatchewan is introducing a Dene Early Learning Pilot Project with the Northern Lights School Division at Ducharme School in La Loche this fall.

La Loche has a large number of adults who speak Dene. Most children understand but only a handful can engage in a fluent discussion.

The DELPP will run parallel to previously announced Michif Early Learning Pilot Project with The Royal Canadian Geographical Society. It will involve select schools in five school divisions, including Regina Public Schools, Regina Catholic Schools, Saskatoon Public Schools, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools and Île-à-la-Crosse School Division.

These announcements come on the heels of the graduation of 21 students of the very

first Dene Teacher Education Program through First Nations University of Canada.

The graduates are excited and ready to apply their hard-earned skills. La Loche has hired eight Dene teacher graduates to foster the next generation of Dene Language Keepers.

These announcements come on the heels of the graduation of 21 students of the very first Dene Teacher Education Program through First Nations University of Canada.

Prekindergarten and kindergarten children from La Loche attending Ducharme School in the fall

are eligible to register for this unique program.

The plan includes an extended school day, parent and community engagement opportunities, Dene Language Keepers providing immersion for children and additional resources including transportation.

Michif is an endangered language. According to 2016 census date, only about 640 people in Canada speak Michif.

The Dene Early Learning Pilot Project is open for student enrolment for the 2020-21 school year. Parents can contact Darcy Ahenakew at darcyahenakew@nlsd113.ca or Lisa Fleming at lfleming@mns.work for more information.

Meanwhile, registration for the Michif Early Learning Pilot Project is also open and people are encouraged to contact their nearest participating school board to have students enrolled. ■

Early learning funding to be extended

Early childhood education supports the development of children in our province by providing high-quality early learning and child-care programs across Saskatchewan.

Early childhood educators who work in these programs provide children with positive early learning and developmentally appropriate experiences.

Educators are working hard to ensure our youngest residents of Saskatchewan are receiving quality education and are going to extraordinary lengths to keep them healthy and safe during this global health pandemic.

“In these unprecedented times, we all can recognize how important child-care support is for many families who want to pursue career and education opportunities or work to provide for their families,” Deputy Premier and Education Minister Gordon Wyant said. “On behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan, I want to thank early childhood

educators for continuing to make a tremendous difference in the lives of families and ensuring children are safe and well cared for.”

As part of the 2020-21 Budget Estimates, the Government of Saskatchewan has allocated funding of \$73.5 million for licensed childcare, including an increase of \$1.7 million for existing licensed child care centres for operating costs. Much of the work that is being done everyday by the early childhood education sector has also supported the initiatives of the Canada-Saskatchewan Early Learning and Child Care Agreement.

To ensure continuity of programs and services, the existing agreement will be extended to 2021 and will continue to focus on providing initiatives in accessibility, inclusivity, quality and Francophone minority language. The Ministry of Education commends the efforts of all community partners who help to support

the early learning sector in Saskatchewan.

“It is important to take the time to properly thank those who dedicate their lives to the care and education of our young children,” Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association Executive Director Georgia Siourounis said. “Early childhood educators work hard to provide safe and loving environments where they can have a positive influence on a child’s life.”

To supplement the efforts of our early childhood educators, Play. Learn. Grow. Together! was developed as a public education program which provides parents and guardians of newborns to kindergarten-aged children with easy to use tips and information to help enhance family learning at home.

The webpage and family friendly videos can be found at www.saskatchewan.ca > [Residents and Visitors > Education and Learning > PreK-12 Education, Early Learning and Schools > Early Years Learning](#). ■

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GET INVOLVED

NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS

Teachers from throughout the province are invited to apply for openings on several Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation committees. These opportunities are a great way to learn more about the issues that matter to Saskatchewan teachers and to make an important contribution to your profession.

Discipline Committees (deadline November 16):

- Ethics and Practice Committee
- Collective Interests Committee

For more information on these openings or to apply, please visit the Get Involved page on our website, www.stf.sk.ca.



PROFESSIONAL
LEARNING

UPCOMING EVENTS

October 15, 2020 – Saskatoon

Nonviolent Crisis Intervention

Learn specific interventions to prevent and/or respond to challenging behaviour with a proactive approach that aligns with PBIS and trauma-informed care initiatives.

October 19-20, 2020 – Saskatoon

Classroom Management: Creating a Positive Classroom Climate

In this workshop, teachers will identify the foundations of a positive classroom environment and develop understanding of how teachers might respond to challenging student behaviour in supportive ways.

For more information about these sessions or to register, visit www.stf.sk.ca.



SASKATCHEWAN
TEACHERS'
FEDERATION

PLANNING FOR RETIREMENT SEMINARS

THINKING ABOUT RETIREMENT?

The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation offers Planning for Retirement seminars for members who are thinking of retiring in the next three years. These online seminars provide key information about the retirement process and the benefits available through the Superannuated Teachers of Saskatchewan.

Members must register for a seminar using the online Events Calendar at www.stf.sk.ca.

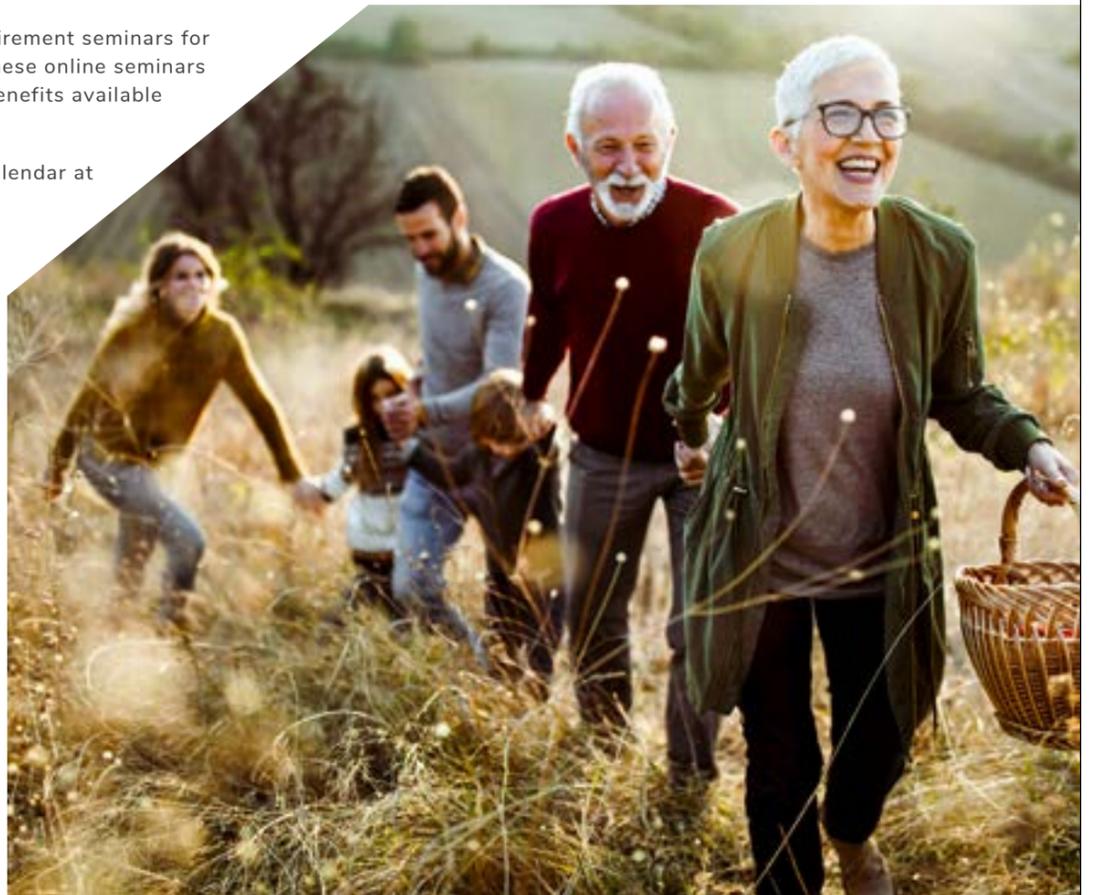
2020 SEMINAR DATES:

Tuesday, October 20
Wednesday, October 28
Thursday, November 5
Tuesday, November 10 – “Ask the Experts” Q&A Session

Seminars run from 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.

Note: Personal pension estimates are not provided at the seminars. You can generate an estimate by using the online Pension Estimator by signing into your MySTF account.

Additional information on the pension plan is available on the STF website at www.stf.sk.ca/pension-benefits/life-events/planning-retirement.



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