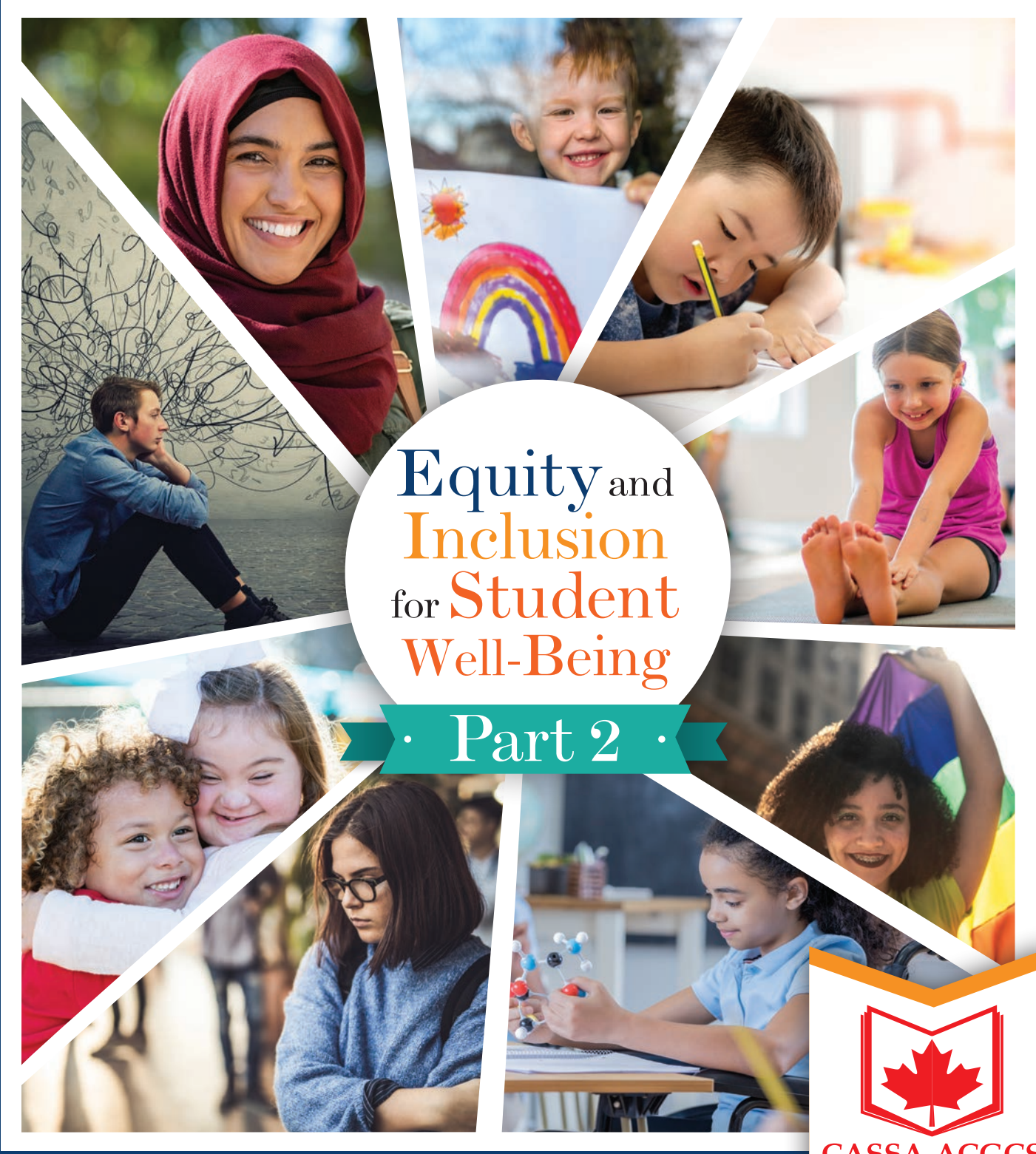


Summer 2020 Leaders & Learners

The official magazine of the Canadian
Association of School System Administrators

Association canadienne des gestionnaires
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Equity and Inclusion for Student Well-Being

• Part 2 •



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This year's theme is **Innovate for Impact**, addressing questions such as:

- ▶ How can professional learning solve the challenges we face in the upcoming school year?
- ▶ What innovative solutions do education leaders need to know for professional learning policies, systems, and practices?
- ▶ How can we measure the impact of professional learning so that your investments are leading to equity and excellence for all students?

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| Summer 2020 |



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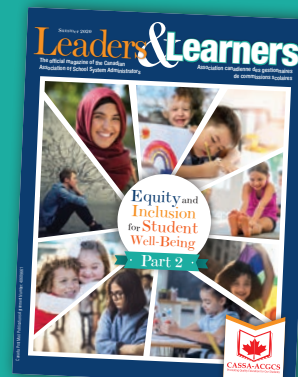
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Dinosaur Teeth

A dinosaur's teeth help us learn what kinds of foods it ate. Meat-eating dinosaurs had long, pointy teeth.



Plant-eating dinosaurs had wide, flat teeth.



▲ From **Discovering Dinosaurs!**

Instrument Families

Instruments are put into groups called families. Each family is made up of instruments that are played in a similar way.



The harp has strings that are plucked to make sounds.

▼ From **Making Music**



A trumpet uses air to make sounds.

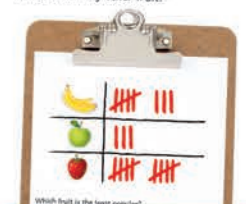
Most and Least Popular

Daniel and Renee look at their tally chart. "Which fruit does our class like the best?" wonders Daniel. "Let's count the tally marks," says Renee.



Counting tally marks tells us the most popular and least popular objects. The object with the biggest number of tally marks is the most popular. The object with the smallest number of tally marks is the least popular.

"The strawberry is the most popular fruit!" exclaims Renee. "It has 10 tally marks. That is more than any other fruit."



Which fruit is the least popular?

▼ From **Data Is Information**

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Servant Leadership in a Pandemic



Reg Klassen
CASSA/ACGCS President

In his book *Servant Leadership*, Robert Greenleaf says that in order to be a servant leader we must answer the following questions: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, will they not be further deprived?

Many years ago I was introduced to the idea of servant leadership and since then have aspired to be that kind of leader. But in the midst of collective agreements, human resource issues, cutbacks, an ever-shrinking dollar, declining enrolment and the numerous other challenges that land on the desk of our administrative positions, this has been no easy task.

Greenleaf goes on to say that the mark of a leader is an attribute that places them in a position to show the way for others; they are instinctively better than most at pointing the direction. This kind of leader always has a goal, knows what it is and can articulate it for any who are unsure. By clearly stating and restating the goal, the leader gives certainty and purpose to others who may have difficulty in achieving it for themselves.

However, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has made Greenleaf's servant leadership notion seem somewhat elusive. Our ability to outline long-term direction diminished overnight as in-school classes were suspended to keep staff and students safe. We moved from long-term goals to answering

As humans, we need opportunity to articulate these new feelings to help us cope.

the immediate questions that came with distance learning. As we found answers, the COVID-19 data changed yet again, and we were required to find new answers.

Then, as we contemplated returning to school in the spring and now in the fall of 2020, the need for answers only intensified. As my senior administration team and I grapple with our new educational circumstance, I wonder if we are providing servant leadership as Greenleaf envisioned it. But I do believe that Greenleaf would consider the pandemic a perfect storm of opportunity for servant leadership.

There are times I need to be reminded how important it is for people to know that someone cares. In our pandemic state, I find myself asking people more often how they are doing because everyone is experiencing new and varying levels of insecurity as the pandemic changes our lives.

As humans, we need opportunity to articulate these new feelings to help us cope. And so as a leader, with a few good questions, I hear countless stories of how

individuals are being affected by COVID-19 and what is most worrisome for them.

This always makes the rest of the conversation easier to navigate. Then I wonder if their life is better for my participation in it through that conversation and if I helped articulate the way more clearly. Were student and parent lives better the last three months of the school year as a result of the decisions I made in the midst of the pandemic?

I am working hard to be consistent with servant leadership in all aspects of my administrative life. There are times when the disconnect of serving and doing my job seems insurmountable. Those moments when the servant-first approach collides with the boundaries of administration duties I have found it is important to listen for deeper understanding. Then, and only then, I can begin to explore options for a solution.

I do believe the pandemic is forcing us to listen more intently because we have so little policy to reference. This is both good and disconcerting at the same time. However, deeper understanding and less policy is never a bad option, and that is what the pandemic has forced upon us.

And finally, this is my last article in *Leaders & Learners* magazine as your President. Thank you for your support. It has been my honour to serve you in this capacity, and I look forward to serving as your Past President. I also want to thank you for your continued support of CASSA, as our organization does not exist without it. And finally, in addition to taking care of CASSA, remember to look after yourselves and each other. Be well.

Share Your Success Stories!

Write for the Winter 2020-2021
and Summer 2021 issues of
Leaders & Learners!

**We are looking for features and success stories from each region of Canada:
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THEME: EQUITY AND INCLUSION FOR STUDENT WELL-BEING



We are looking for articles about how schools, school districts and community partners are **supporting every student** through programs, community partnerships and professional development for principals and teachers that promote *Equity and Inclusion for Student Well-being*.

The Winter 2020-2021 edition will be mailed to readers in January 2021 and will be available to attendees at our Conference, which will be held in July 2021 in Montreal and is focused on this same theme.

If you have an article idea that fits into this theme, please send a short abstract (50 to 100 words) to Kaitlin Vitt, editor of the magazine, at kvitt@matrixgroupinc.net, and copy ken_bain@cassa-acgcs.ca.

Proposals are due: September 14, 2020

Final articles are due: November 2, 2020

Photos are welcome (must be high resolution)

You will be notified if your abstract is selected.



CASSA-ACGCS
Promoting Quality Education for Our Students

Staying Healthy and Safe

I hope that this message finds you and your families safe and healthy. Healthiness has many dimensions – emotional, physical, spiritual, to name a few. It is my hope that you are taking care of, as best as possible, all aspects of your healthiness.

System leaders, along with school and classroom leaders, have been working long hours to ensure that all students can continue to learn in whatever form that takes this fall. The pandemic has uncovered, or at least highlighted, inequities in our jurisdictions that we must not forget or lose sight of when schools re-engage. From food insecurity to the lack of access to technology and connectivity, the inequities across our districts have become glaringly obvious. The challenge, of course, is figuring out what can and will we do about it.

The articles in this issue highlight the pre-pandemic efforts of school boards to support equitable schools, classrooms and districts. In addition to British Columbia's support for LGBTQ2S+ students, the work in Edmonton Catholic providing welcoming environments, Niagara Catholic's focus on recess and its connection to mental health and exploring Wellington Catholic's work with students to learn more about unconscious bias, this issue also highlights one of the Rick Hansen Foundation's ambassadors and shares how French language school boards outside of Quebec are ensuring welcoming environments for new students while reflecting an inclusive and rich francophonie.

CASSA is planning to reconvene in Montreal in July 2021 as long as it is safe to do so. We will use the same theme for Montreal, *Equity and Inclusion for Student Well-Being*, and will ask our speakers and workshops to reflect on the lessons learned



Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

from this pandemic as they shape their presentations where appropriate.

We will return to St. Andrews By-the-Sea in 2022 and look forward to wonderful Maritime hospitality.

As systems and schools gradually re-open, I know that you will attend to the healthiness of your communities, especially the social-emotional health as students return from many months of isolation and return to a "new normal" school experience.

Thank you for all you do to support the healthiness of your communities while ensuring continuity of learning in these extraordinary times.

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British Columbia's

SOGI Success Story

By Claire Guy, B.C. School Superintendents Association

What a difference a year (or two, or four) makes! In May 2018, I wrote an article for

Leaders & Learners magazine describing the innovative work that the provincial education partners in British Columbia had undertaken to advance the work of supporting each student through sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI)-inclusive schools.

I am pleased to report that in just two short years, we are now at a place where we no longer have to convince most people of “the why” and “the what” and now can focus on “the how.” SOGI is now a word that is common in educational circles and is considered “just part of what we do, because it is the right thing to do!”

In British Columbia, we were fortunate to have the non-profit ARC Foundation partner with the Ministry of Education to spearhead this work for us in 2016 and to show us a path forward. Now, like a child who may have needed training wheels on

their first bicycle, the ARC Foundation is encouraging us to ride and balance on our own two wheels, and we are ready to explore new directions as the road takes us where we need to go. As collective education partners, we have formed what is now known as the B.C. SOGI Collaborative and are working together to support SOGI inclusive education.

The power of the Collaborative stems from the fact that we have systemic representation.

In just four years, we now have all 60 public school districts, our independent schools and virtually all education partners on board to actively support the work. While we may bring different perspectives to the table, there is value placed on listening and finding common ground and connection points to enable true collaboration.

The leadership from the ministry and the ARC Foundation provided the impetus to empower the partners to make it happen. An environment was created where there was a moral imperative requiring us to do it, but guidance and support was readily provided for those who needed help. The combination of top-down pressure and support

with a true grassroots approach aligning with the modelling of those on the ground connected to students was the perfect recipe for consistent progress.

As the work has evolved, it is the personal stories of courage and relationships that have provided the impetus to move forward. We recognize and celebrate the intersectionality of all that makes us human, including race, religion, culture and the importance of weaving these values together into the SOGI Collaborative work.

While people can understand “the what” and “the why,” we know that it is always “the how” of any initiative that makes or breaks its success. One of the key factors for the success of the SOGI work is providing the resources to the educators and administrators in schools to build collective capacity. There has been a variety of excellent and accessible resources provided, including websites, videos, books, meeting networks and gatherings and more.

Furthermore, it can't be stated enough that resources include champions in every part of our province and partner group. Without their purposeful voices and passion,

the work simply wouldn't have moved forward. It is still an area where not everyone feels comfortable or knowledgeable, and there is still a fear of getting it wrong. Therefore, having the champions (our SOGI leads) armed with resources to walk alongside the educators has been transformative to our collective achievement.

Part of our recent emphasis on inclusion for well-being has been on embedding Indigenous ways of knowing and being into the work of the SOGI Collaborative. We listen intently to the advice of our Indigenous Rightsholders and Knowledge Keepers and look to them to guide us to be culturally responsive to the needs of our Indigenous students, staff and families. We are focusing on providing First Nations and intercultural resources to broaden the understanding and reach within communities to bring equity through an Indigenous perspective to our students and families.

The Collaborative recently engaged in six dialogue circles to gather input from key educational partners on specific SOGI topics. The goal is to produce a provincial framework resource document to assist districts in moving forward with supporting student transitions, policy development, facilities, professional development, communications and committees. This resource will assist school districts with the how of implementing SOGI inclusive practice in all schools and will serve as another formative tool to move the work along, especially in places where there may be a lack of capacity or struggles.

We are also looking to galvanize the youth voice to lead SOGI inclusive practices in B.C. schools. Our youth bring a positive, futuristic and hopeful perspective that is often far more insightful and inclusive than the adults surrounding them, and the importance of this voice should not be overlooked. A goal for the SOGI Collaborative is to form a Youth Advisory Committee as part of a larger project of creating and supporting more provincial SOGI resources for school districts – a work in progress currently underway.

Finally, the importance of sharing our stories and celebrating steps along the way has been a key factor in the success of the SOGI Collaborative from the start. In October 2019, as part of the B.C. SOGI Summit, a festive party was thrown to thank the champions from the Collaborative.

It was an uplifting event that featured an outstanding professional musical group called

Queer Funk that literally got the place rocking. And the guest speaker was one of our SOGI school leads who moonlights as a drag queen. Hedda shared a message of courage and being true to one's authentic self, then sang for the group to a standing ovation.

Hedda's advice was, "Don't be afraid to bring out your inner drag queen." Those words have stuck with me, and now when I think of any challenging situation or of the courageous things people do each day, I remember that message and think of Hedda – someone who is forging a hopeful path forward for our youth.

While there may exist occasions where judgment, controversy and even prejudice still prevail, people like Hedda, who are willing to stand up and share their personal

stories of triumph, are leading the way and encouraging our youth to be true to themselves. When we all know the importance of connectedness and well-being to student success, we in British Columbia are making a difference in our province's schools and welcoming LGBTQ2S+ students who are now thriving and leading their authentic lives.

British Columbia is now recognized as a jurisdiction that other provinces look to as a leader in this area, and we are pleased to share our learning and networks further afield. ○

Claire Guy is the Executive Director of the B.C. School Superintendents Association. She works to promote student safety, well-being and inclusion, and most recently championed SOGI education in British Columbia.



An Inclusive Values-Based Approach to Supporting Students

By Cheryl Shinkaruk, Edmonton Catholic Schools

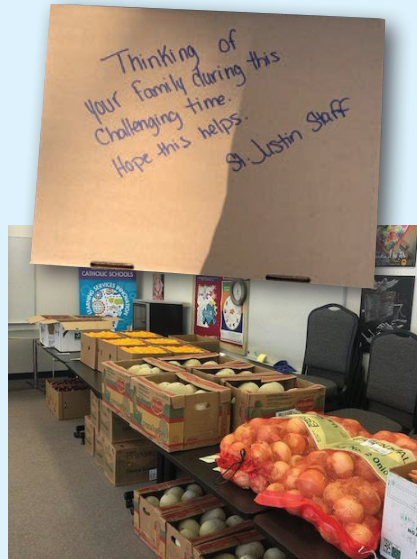
“**A**lberta’s vision for an inclusive education system is that each and every student has the relevant learning opportunities and supports necessary to become an engaged and successful learner.”¹

Within today’s global environment, multiple pathways, various strategies and approaches assist our schools in providing an inclusive values-based learning environment, which supports a holistic model in which mental health and well-being are considered essential components for nurturing the whole child. Given the important relationship between inclusion, positive mental health and academic success, schools have a critical role in supporting students’ overall well-being.

In 2015, the Alberta government released an amendment to the Education Act, which addresses the importance of supportive learning environments in an inclusive education system. “Students are entitled to welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respect diversity and nurture a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self,” the act states.²

In alignment with the safe and caring schools directive from Alberta Education, Edmonton Catholic Schools established Administrative Procedure 160, Commitment to Inclusive Communities, which outlines that a nurturing inclusive community is one in which each person is welcomed, accepted and supported as a child of God.

In 2017, Edmonton Catholic Schools collaborated with other school authorities, community partners and cross-ministry partners to contribute to the Alberta resource *Working Together to Support Mental Health in Alberta Schools*. The vision for the resource is to create a common understanding of how every student in Alberta has the supports they need to develop positive mental health, be an engaged, successful learner and reach their full potential. At the division level, Edmonton Catholic Schools developed a Mental Health Strategic



TOP: Messages were left along with food hampers to assist families.

BOTTOM: Family school liaison workers reached out to vulnerable families to provide non-contact food hamper drop-offs or pickups.

Plan, which is fair and equitable to all students and ensures that all students’ mental health and well-being is attended to through a continuum of supports. The plan acknowledges that everyone is responsible for creating and upholding an environment where all are welcome and where promoting the dignity and rights of each and every person is established.

As the COVID-19 pandemic impacted our schools, we were faced with having to quickly transition to remote teaching and learning, which brought to the forefront the concerns of inclusion and inequity. As a result, there needed to be multiple levels of support, such as general universal supports, targeted supports and individualized or crisis supports. As we faced the unknown, we needed to continue our whole school approach in an integrated and holistic manner.

As Margaret Wheatley writes in *Finding Our Way*, “It is possible to prepare for the future without knowing what it will be. The primary way to prepare for the unknown is to attend to the quality of our relationships, to how well we know and trust one another.”³

Maintaining relationships with individual students and families while school buildings are closed is a crucial task.

“When physical distancing is deemed necessary, social and emotional connectedness is even more critical,” says Karen Niemi, president and CEO of Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.⁴

When individuals know they can depend on one another, it builds a true sense of community and sense of belonging. Being empathetic, open and authentic helps to cultivate a bond of trust. As we are all navigating these new realities, we need to keep in mind that relationships are foundational to the overall success and emotional well-being of all students.

Through a proactive approach, teachers were quick to mobilize to remote learning, by re-establishing meaningful connections with their parents and students. Remote learning must focus on connecting with others and fostering the existing relationships, along with cultivating new relationships with our students, colleagues and community partners. Creating strong, healthy communities online is vital, especially when students, teachers and staff may experience isolation or feel disconnected.

To allow for equity and inclusion for all, teachers had to attend to both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities. Due to time restraints and parental commitments, in some instances student learning and support took place outside of regular school hours. As a result, teachers were flexible in making connections and communicating with their students. Students appreciated the one on one contact that was established with their teacher through Microsoft Teams sessions. Students were able to interact with one another within large and small group instruction and continue developing their relationships. One teacher indicated that the simple strategy of having students check in through the online chat box function with an emoji allowed for students to express how they were feeling.

Through curricular instruction, teachers used Flipgrid with students, which facilitated students sharing their voices in order to

communicate with others. Many teachers used physical activity across learning domains, along with embedding a social-emotional learning component in lessons to cultivate a sense of physical and emotional well-being.

Nurturing relationships with students and parents was not just dependant on teachers, it was a team effort that was highly dependant on our entire school division staff, including the multi-disciplinary team and intercultural liaison staff. The multi-discipline team, which includes consultants, family school liaison workers, mental health therapists, emotional behavioural specialists, psychologists, speech-language pathologists and many more, were highly instrumental in continuing strong relationships with students and families, along with forming new connections/partnerships with other organizations.

Intercultural liaison staff also supported newcomer families by linking with classroom teachers to provide a wide range of community and remote learning supports. These strategies significantly impacted the mental health and well-being of all students.

Family school liaison workers reached out to our most vulnerable families to provide non-contact food hamper drop-offs or pickups at the schools, which nurtured ongoing relationships. Porch visits and virtual sessions provided the emotional support needed by many children and their families.

By establishing new relationships with various organizations, staff were able to supply computers and Wi-Fi, to families, which addressed some of the barriers and anxious feelings around learning.

"During these times of physical distancing, it is so important to be a listening ear and be compassionate and caring to all our students and their families," one family school liaison worker said.

The pandemic exposed the digital divide, and as a result school staff had to pivot to find new and innovative strategies to be equitable and inclusive to meet the academic, social-emotional, mental health and well-being of their students.

While much uncertainty surrounds how schools will reopen, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need to focus on creating equitable and inclusive conditions within our educational system. Through a co-ordinated response under the Edmonton Catholic Schools Mental Health Strategic Plan, we will continue to nurture relationships, which support the mental health and well-being of all students. In this moment of transition, we have an opportunity to reflect, innovate and build on evidence-based practices within our schools.

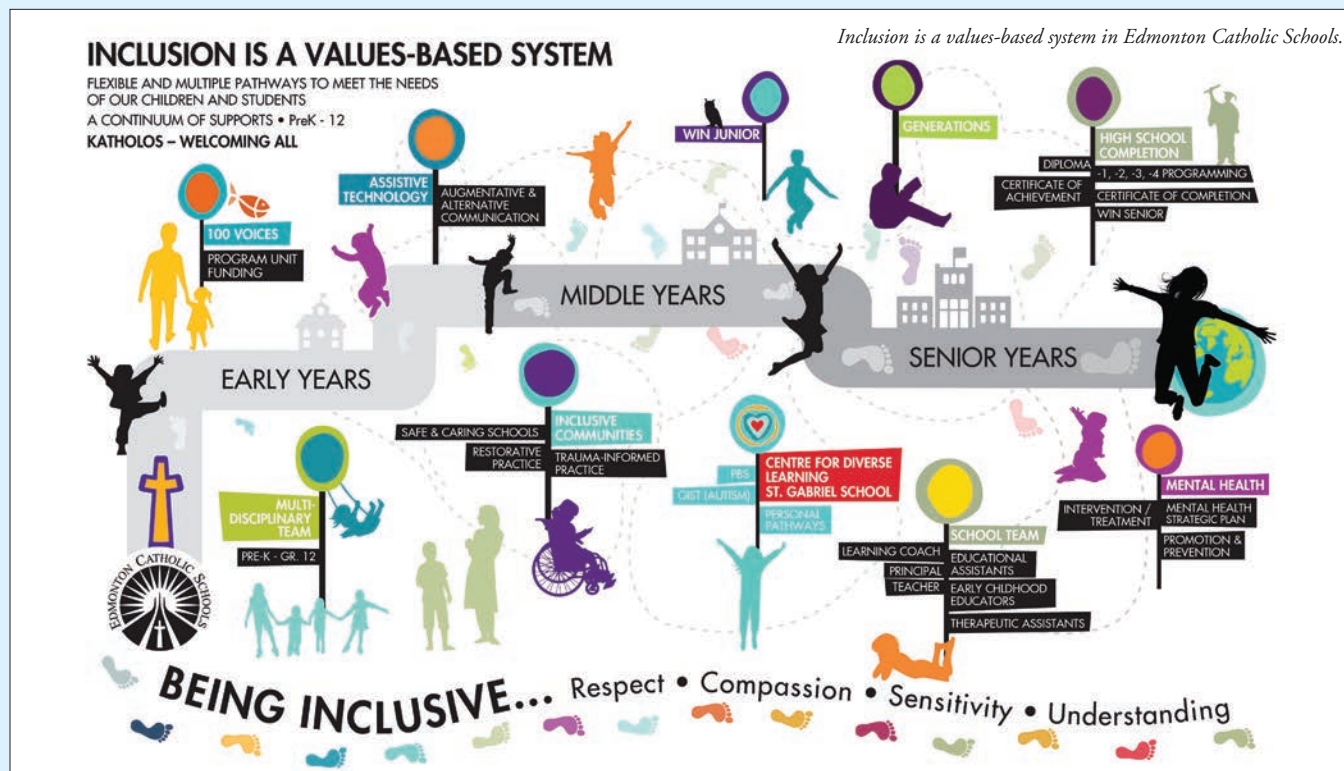
The coming months will mark continued transitions for everyone in school communities as they prepare for an academic year that offers new types of relationships and learning. As we

plan for the upcoming school year, Edmonton Catholic Schools will continue to focus on co-creating supportive learning environments, where all students can feel a sense of belonging and thrive. ○

Cheryl Shinkaruk is the Manager: Programs and Projects with Edmonton Catholic Schools. Upon completion of her master of education in curriculum, she continues to champion student mental health and wellbeing through a Comprehensive School Health approach.

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Why Recess and Social Connectedness Matters – Now, More Than Ever

By Lauren McNamara,
Ryerson University; Lee Ann
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District School Board; and
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Catholic District School Board

Considerable research documents what many of us have long suspected: what happens at recess influences children's engagement with school, classmates, classwork and teachers. From a student's perspective, recess is much more than a break – it's an important social space that reflects their social and emotional needs. Now, more than ever, students will need safe, supported and meaningful opportunities to connect with their peers in their school communities.

The Niagara Catholic District School Board, in partnership with Dr. Lauren McNamara and the Recess Project, is working to ensure recess is a meaningful, inclusive and accepting space for students. Director of Education John Crocco has begun the facilitation of dialogue between Dr. McNamara and the Ontario Ministry of Education, Ontario Ministry of Health and Directors of Education and Superintendents in support of the important research, insights and practical application for professional development of staff, students and parents in all schools across Canada.

"We are committed to working collaboratively with Dr. McNamara to advance research on recess and provide a positive, safe and inclusive environment for all students," Crocco said.

Rethinking Recess

Many of us are now aware that attending to children's social and emotional needs is critical, as healthy children are clearly better learners. Yet, despite progressive improvements over the last 100 years, the way schools approach recess has gone relatively



unchanged, even as conflict and discipline issues increase. In fact, of all the developed nations, Canada has one of the highest rates of school-based violence – and much of it happens during recess.

Research on recess indicates that a low-priority approach leads to minimal levels of supervision, planning, training, equipment, space and accountability. Familiar recess issues of social conflict, behavioural challenges and safety concerns continue, year after year. Children are often bored, sedentary and anxiously navigating a social space where bullying and exclusion are routine and normalized behaviours.

Recess, Social Connections and Mental Health

When recess is viewed as a social space, we can see how powerful it can be on children's well-being. Social relationships – for better or for worse – carry intense emotional and psychological weight.

The importance of social relationships is best explained from an evolutionary perspective. It would have been difficult for our ancestors to survive in isolation; relationships provide protection, shared resources and reproductive opportunities. We can see this, for example, in babies: fear, separation anxiety and crying ensure infants remain close to the caregiver, increasing the odds they receive essential nourishment, nurturing and protection to survive.

As children grow more sophisticated, so too do their interactions. These interactions

provide context for emotional support, enjoyment, creativity, physical activity, social competence and the development of social identities. These interactions are designed to shape the development of the brain, language, thinking, emotions and behaviours – and the biological, psychological and social become inseparably entwined. Consider how we feel when others understand us – we feel content. What we are feeling, specifically, is a sense of belonging – a framework with well-established links to positive emotions such as elation, security and calmness. In this way, our biology is designed to ensure we remain close.

Conversely, then, this need to maintain connections is so powerful that, just like hunger, unmet needs disrupt our thinking, emotions and behaviour. For example, feelings of exclusion and rejection are emotionally unsettling, even physically painful. Those who feel rejected or betrayed often focus attention on restoring social bonds, using up cognitive resources that could be better used elsewhere. Given that recess is the only school-based opportunity for children to freely connect with peers, there is much more we can do to support them.

Recess, Equity and Moving Forward

Negative social experiences disproportionately affect children from vulnerable populations, undermining the positive benefits of social connection. Moreover, school play-spaces in more vulnerable neighbourhoods tend to be disproportionately smaller, barren and lacking equipment than more advantaged

counterparts, resulting in higher incidences of boredom, conflict and negative social patterns that further reinforce inequality. As many of us are aware, the pandemic has not only exposed but also exacerbated the effects of inequality.

Moreover, the isolation, instability, stress, fear and uncertainty of the last few months have resulted in significant deterioration of our collective mental health. Given that the majority of mental illness starts in childhood, school planning efforts must ensure that children have the time and support to heal and reconnect with their peers in meaningful ways. Doing so will mitigate increases in anxiety and depression that undermine well-being and school engagement.

Though we are faced with many challenges as we plan for reopening, we have an unprecedented opportunity to discard outdated practices and replace them. But widespread systemic changes will depend greatly on the ways in which administrators engage in serious conversations about recess, convey its importance to principals and educators and provide durable supports that will enable sustainable and meaningful change.

Some concrete steps that administrators can take to mobilize change may include:

- Creating a recess committee;
- Setting annual goals in board plans that support improved recess;
- Ensuring questions specific to recess experiences are included in school climate surveys;
- Allocating funds to support recess in schools;
- Ensuring professional development opportunities; and
- Focusing conversations with the board and school staff about meaningful, engaging and supported recess breaks for students of all ages; the importance of risk in play; thoughtful space design; children's rights with respect to rest and play; insurance, safety and liability concerns; and the timing and duration of recess, including accommodations for recess supervision. ○

Lauren McNamara holds a PhD in the psychology of education and an MA in learning sciences. She is an Ashoka Fellow and the founder, director and senior research scientist of The Recess Project. Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells is the Superintendent of Education, Equity and Inclusive Education at the Niagara Catholic District School Board. Christine Battagli is a research,

assessment, evaluation and reporting consultant with the Niagara Catholic District School Board.

For a full list of references associated with this article, please email Editor Kaitlin Vitt at kvitt@matrixgroupinc.net.



The Right to Play

The need for healthy, meaningful play and social connection has been deemed so fundamental to development that the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child established it as a basic right for every child. Article 31 was designed to ensure all children have meaningful opportunities for play and leisure, emphasizing the need to be protected from the effects of social exclusion, discrimination and social harm. Long overlooked, this information needs to be reflected in provincial education acts.

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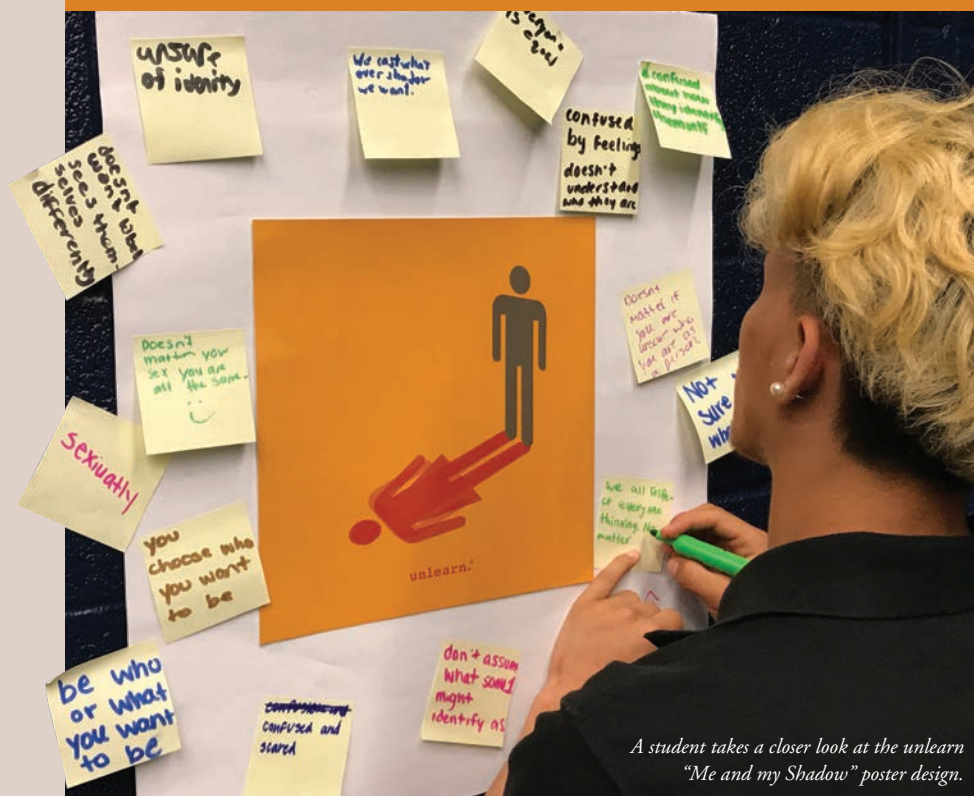
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A student takes a closer look at the unlearn "Me and my Shadow" poster design.

Creating Student Upstanders:

A Collaboration with Unlearn

By Yvonne Runstedler and Brian Capovilla,
Wellington Catholic District School Board

It is with deep gratitude that I reflect on our full-year collaboration with Lakhdeep Dhaliwal, vice-president of equity education for unlearn, and founder and facilitator Abhi Ahluwalia. In the three-plus hours we spent unpacking their workshops in Wellington Catholic District School Board's Grade 7, 8 and 10 classes, they described their work in terms of a vocation: words synonymous with service, gift and transformation often arose.

In our time of reflection, we struggled to adequately describe the interactions with students on the myriad of topics possible when using unlearn's Poster Packs 1 and 2 that help to "stimulate social and emotional learning through critical thinking."

The best way to describe the transformational aspect of their workshops for teachers and students is to share insights from a selection of individual stories. Upon arriving early at a school, Dhaliwal overheard a conversation in the hallway. A student had looked at him, a Sikh man with a beard and turban, and commented to his friend that there was a terrorist in the building. Feeling hurt and "like my balloon had been popped" for a few moments, Dhaliwal wondered at how the presentation on equity that he was about to facilitate would proceed.

Then, as he says, only a moment later, something extraordinary happened. A student "upstander" hearing this comment made it clear through his tone and word choice that this was unacceptable, telling the other student who made the offensive comment that kind of racist stereotyping was uncool. (Upstander is a term used by unlearn founder Ahluwalia to denote those who transcend passive bystanding into active advocacy.)

Serendipitously, these students turned up in the unlearn workshop only moments later where they had the opportunity to hear Dhaliwal share some of his personal stories where he had been the target of racism, and they were invited to view many of unlearn's thought-provoking posters. Some examples of what they might have seen include:

- A caged brain with a small opening, just enough to indicate the potential of hope for a more inclusive future;
- Puzzle pieces that, when turned just a little, demonstrate the possibility for inclusion; and

- Four student heads in front of a blackboard, each with a battery at a different charge, one almost on empty.

In each of the 30 classrooms visited, teachers were asked to select one poster for every three students in their class, empowering them to address issues and a localized concern through the thoughtful selection of images. If students in a particular class needed time to discuss gender inclusion, there was a poster for that. If poverty was the most pressing need, there were posters for that, too.

Body image, globalization, privilege, social media, education, access, climate change and more were all represented through images in the posters. In the workshops, the posters were placed on chart paper around the learning space.

As part of the presentation, Ahluwalia and Dhaliwal invited students to participate in a silent reflective conversation, spending time first with one poster, digesting it by simple observation, then making personal connections by writing their ideas on the chart paper. In a second round, students could respond to others' thoughts by writing their ideas on other pieces of chart paper with different posters.

The result? Deep insight. Personal connection to lived experience of marginalization and oppression. Connections and relationships built between Wellington Catholic students, teachers, unlearn and more.

In this exchange between the Wellington Catholic District School Board and unlearn, I had many of my own moments of unlearning. This collaborative effort as part of our Equity Action Plan was more than just about showing students thought-provoking posters. In the best form of educational experience, all present are in the process of unlearning.

It bears mentioning that the preceding story of racial profiling was a rarity. Both Dhaliwal and Ahluwalia shared that they unlearned what

they thought it might be like to enter every school in our board, citing examples of teachers and administrators who enthusiastically lived inclusion and equity through example.

As a program co-ordinator with responsibilities in Equity and Inclusion, initially I did not give a lot of thought to the impact these workshops would have on staff, as my focus was more on the student participants. As their presentations progressed throughout schools in our district, I received a steady stream of unsolicited messages from teachers who expressed gratitude for the deft facilitation, inclusive nature and lived experiences of diversity shared by Ahluwalia and Dhaliwal.

When a teacher thanked me for what they said was a valuable professional development experience, I realized that the reverberations of this work transcended student development to direct impact on school culture. In a sense, I unlearned my own notion of professional development, which before this would have been more greatly characterized by the workshop model. Having unlearned discuss experiences of identity with calm honesty and authentically share their lived experiences was informative for both staff and students.

"Abhi and Lakhdeep entered our rooms and opened our eyes to the hidden views people have, sometimes not even realizing we had some of our own," said Nicole Picanco and Kevin Kelly, Grade 7 teachers at Holy Trinity Catholic High School in Guelph, Ont.

"Within a short period of time, we were all drawn into their experiences, thought-provoking ideas and spiraling questions, hooking us in through human connection. They encouraged our questioning and dialogue, and quickly we started unpacking all kinds of biases that can be difficult to discuss and analyze in such an open forum. The safe space they created allowed for truth to be heard, questioning without judgment,

empathy and learning. These key aspects intermingled and created lifelong learning for us and for our students."

At the end of our time together, I asked Ahluwalia and Dhaliwal to share one word to describe their year in all of the Wellington Catholic schools. Dhaliwal shared "language," citing the potentially destructive previous example as one of his reasons. The power of language that day both nearly crushed then uplifted him, as one student came to his unsolicited defense.

Ahluwalia shared the word, "seva." Coming from the Sikh tradition, seva is selfless service. Upon first glance, it is a gift to others through something akin to volunteering. A deeper second glance reveals that working in the pervasive way that he did was also a gift of learning – or, perhaps more aptly, unlearning.

In summation, my own word is "humility." As a program coordinator, I often lead professional learning. More importantly, sometimes, and particularly in the case of our collaboration with unlearn, the best advocacy is creating the entry point for others to speak through careful planning then getting out of the way to watch the transformation take place. ○

Yvonne Runstedler is a program coordinator for the Wellington Catholic District School Board with responsibilities in equity and inclusion. Her passion lies in the promotion of social justice and, at the time of publication, is mid-way through a doctoral program at Wilfrid Laurier University in the area of equity and inclusion.

Brian Capovilla is currently Superintendent of Human Resources and Leadership Development with the Wellington Catholic District School Board. He has led a variety of portfolios including special education, student success, equity, mental health and well-being, technology enabled learning and human resources.

Thank You to all Canadian educators who are tirelessly helping one another and your students navigate the loss, grief, and immense change in this time of COVID-19. It has been both a joy and an honour to work with so many of you over the past 49 years. As we all reassess how we work with one another and how best to teach and support our youth, *kids are worth it! inc* (www.kidsareworthit.com) is offering two free downloadable handbooks for educators.

1. **An Essential Guide for Educators on Bullying**—based on the international best seller, *The Bully, The Bullied, and The Not-So-Innocent Bystander*
2. **Parenting Wit and Wisdom**—highlights from the international bestsellers, *kids are worth it!* and *Parenting through Crisis*

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Inspiring the Next Generation of Accessibility and Inclusion Champions

By Diane Talbot-Schoenhoff, Rick Hansen Foundation

Rick Hansen Foundation (RHF) Ambassador Jordan Rogodzinski loves promoting student health and well-being through inclusion. His passion is evident in the regular school speaking engagements he does about the importance of including people with disabilities.

“If talking to these students makes a difference in people’s lives, I feel like I’ve done a good job,” Rogodzinski says. “And that makes me feel great. I may not see it directly, but even if they tell someone what they’ve learned, or do something to help another person, they in turn will feel happier and healthier in their own lives.”

Rogodzinski, now 21, is a 2018 RHF School Program Difference Maker of the

Year recipient who was inspired to become an RHF Ambassador in November of that same year. He was recognized for connecting students of different abilities through his YouTube sports show, Jordan 411 Sports.

With its diverse line-up of guests including athletes and thought leaders, the show highlights that everyone has something to offer, regardless of the barriers they face. Rogodzinski’s unique approach to covering sports has caught the attention of the United Way Youth Forum, the Winnipeg Jets and Blue Bombers, Shaw TV, CTV News and Winnipeg’s talk radio station CJOB and sportscaster Kelly Moore, all of which has led to some high-profile opportunities to share his content.

Born with cerebral palsy and a cognitive disability, Rogodzinski shows the world that people with disabilities are talented and driven and achieve great things. Most of the time he uses a wheelchair, and sometimes a walker

for short distances. Fine motor movements and reading pose challenges, so activities like writing, typing and reading don’t come easily. Rogodzinski focuses on his strengths, like his charismatic personality, which shines through in his insightful questions and the way he puts his guests at ease.

“Being an RHF Difference Maker inspired me to keep going even after the award, to keep on making a difference. I want the younger generation to realize the impact they can have,” he says. “It’s important for them to see me in a wheelchair doing a presentation.”

Making a connection with Rogodzinski gets students excited about wanting to create a more equitable and inclusive environment within their school. Educators who incorporate the Rick Hansen Foundation School Program (RHFSP) free, bilingual resources about access and inclusion into their lessons generate the same kind of excitement.

“Students talked about Jordan’s presentation well into the lunch hour,” says Susan Reynolds, principal at Dr. F.W.L. Hamilton School. “They loved his sense of humour – they talked at length about being positive and how to include everyone.”

Equity and Inclusion Fosters Student Well-Being

“Every provincial and territorial government is committed to the principles of equity and inclusion and their connectedness to student well-being,” wrote Ken Bain, Executive Director of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA-ACGCS), in a memo.

RHF Ambassador presentations and resources are a great place to start when it comes to incorporating equity and inclusion conversations into your lessons. The curriculum-aligned resources provide educators with the tools to teach youth in K-12 about confidence and compassion within themselves, so they can help create more equitable and inclusive spaces with others.

Following the transition to online delivery of education due to COVID-19, RHFSP launched Little Big Lessons, age-appropriate, bite-sized lessons for both educators and parents on the big ideas of accessibility, inclusion and disability awareness.

The best thing about Ambassador presentations and RHFSP resources isn’t that they’re free – it’s that they work. Results from the 2018-2019 RHFSP End of Year Survey show that following the use of RHFSP resources:

- 93 per cent of educators said students had an increased awareness of how physical



Jordan Rogodzinski has interviewed many sports stars, including Reggie Abercrombie of the Winnipeg Goldeyes. Photo from YouTube. Search “Jordan411 Sports” to find his channel.

barriers impact people with disabilities and what they could do to make the physical environment more accessible;

- 74 per cent of educators said students demonstrated increased inclusion in class and play; and
- 84 per cent of educators said students saw themselves as capable of making a difference.

Equity and Inclusion in Action

Rogodzinski has also been the recipient of the Yes I Can Award, which recognizes youth with disabilities who have demonstrated their determination and achievements in multiple ways.

“Jordan has been working to create a more inclusive society all his life,” says Jennifer Jantz, his resource teacher. “He is a charismatic and personable young person who helps those around him see the positives in people.”

Along with continuing his work as an RHF Ambassador, Rogodzinski got offered a part in another local radio show this past year with Mike FM Studios. His continuous commitment to living his purpose and developing a strong sense of self shows what is possible when you choose to see the ability in yourself and in others.

Visit www.rickhansen.com/schools to book an RHF Ambassador presentation or to learn more about free RHF School Program resources. ○

Since 1988, the Rick Hansen Foundation has raised awareness, changed attitudes and funded spinal cord injury research and care. The foundation is working on breaking down one of the most fundamental barriers that people with disabilities still face: physical barriers in the places where we live, work, learn and play.



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The Importance of Fostering Dialogue

By Valérie Morand, National Federation of French-Language School Boards

In July 2020, in the midst of summer, some 35 parents and students took to the streets in Edmonton to call on the local francophone school board to take steps such as hiring Black teachers in an effort to address what they perceive as systemic racism in schools. A few days before, some former students who attended a French-language high school in Winnipeg had gone public on social media saying they had been victims of racial discrimination. Calls for change come as institutions across North America struggle to address anti-Black racism.

Yet, French-language school boards in minority settings in Canada – that is, outside the province of Quebec – have come a long way in providing an inclusive and equity-based environment for all its 170,000 students.

Cultural diversity was once seen as a challenge by francophone school boards. But with the steady rise in enrolment for the last eight years, the bulk of it coming from francophone immigrants, francophone school boards have had to adapt quickly. The learning curve to provide a school environment free of biases, stereotypes and discrimination where each student is treated with empathy, dignity and respect has not been pain free.

But some winning practices have emerged that act as a beacon for school boards still wrestling with the best approach to foster an inclusive environment where students' well-being and academic success is paramount.

The Importance of Taking Intersectionality into Account

The National Federation of French-Language School Boards represents 28 francophone school boards across the country. It aims to help its members gain a better understanding of cultural diversity. Most of its efforts rest with the Strategic Plan for French-Language Education (PSELF). One

of the plan's objectives is to share winning practices, therefore enabling school boards to create learning environments that value and foster the inclusion and integration of immigrant students and their families.

The Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario (CEPEO) has risen to the opportunity and has acted as a trailblazer on this issue. The Ottawa-based school board comprises 43 schools and over 16,000 students who speak 50 different languages.

During the past five years, the school board has recorded a 16 per cent growth (2,200 students), marked by the construction of three new schools and the purchase of six new sites for future school facilities. It is this growth that led the CEPEO to address the issue of diversity.

This diversity manifests itself in multiple respects, such as the origins and migratory routes, racial and ethno-cultural identities, belief systems, gender identities and gender expressions, sexual orientations, family structures, socioeconomic profiles and disability situations, among others, without being limited to these dimensions alone.

An individual exists in an intersection of different identity dimensions. This intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, has an effect on the way one experiences the world – and the way one is perceived by society.

“At the CEPEO, we are in a situation of increasing complexity and increasing awareness of diversity,” explains Nathalie Sirois, an advisor on equity and human rights at the school board. “The more visible aspects of our human diversity created an opportunity to explore diversity issues more broadly, and once we started exploring them, it became clear that there are many elements of diversity beyond the cultural dimension.”

The Pedagogy of Discomfort

“In the course of my work, if I don't make people uncomfortable at some point it means I am not doing my job well,” says Sirois. “Making people uncomfortable is not in itself the objective. However, learning to handle the various forms of discomfort that tend to arise when addressing these issues is part of the required learning.”

Looking at the different aspects of diversity and the responsibilities to be borne in education in terms of human rights can provoke a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity.

“In the course of my work, if I don't make people uncomfortable at some point it means I am not doing my job well.”

However, this feeling is completely normal and even necessary, Sirois says.

These are the discussions that allow a society to progress by identifying points of tension, discomfort and disagreement and asking itself the real questions. According to Sirois, when it comes to equity, we must look at the non-functioning elements. This makes it possible for us to adopt a growth mentality and build collective efficacy.

CEPEO has implemented several initiatives related to diversity, equity and inclusion, including le programme d'appui aux nouveaux arrivants (support services to newcomers), settlement workers in schools, tutoring services, the Community Café Program (weekly networking and workshops on overarching themes for parents) and the Twinning Program that pairs a family who already knows the school and its community well with a newcomer family (community and social integration for the family and integration at school for child learners).

But it's the creation of a systemic equity and human rights advisory committee that was perhaps the boldest step. The committee is made of staff members, students, parents or adults responsible for students and representative of community organizations.

The mandate of the committee is to serve as a point of contact and a place of dialogue between stakeholders in order to identify and address the systemic barriers that can hinder the success, well-being and full development of students and staff. The committee can therefore identify issues, recommend measures and offer recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the equity, accessibility, inclusion and anti-oppression measures undertaken by the school board.

According to Sirois, it is one thing to support students with educational elements. However, in order to be truly effective, we must also think in terms of the family. Diversity is not only about newcomer

families (immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers), but also for students born in Canada: there is much local diversity.

It is in looking at the issues of differing origins and taking intersectionality into account that the CEPEO decided to create Sirois' position. The position's objective is to look at diversity as a whole and to support organizational change in matters relating to equity, human rights and pluralism.

“When you offer resources and support equally to all, you end up exacerbating existing inequalities. So, with regard to equity, you must design programs and treat people in such a way that people can have access to equal chances,” says Sirois.

What If We Don't Focus On Equity, Anti-Oppression and Inclusion?

When the complex work of equity and inclusion is not done in educational institutions, it is youth who pay the price. One important way to address this is through training for educators in order to develop intercultural skills while integrating the lens of equity, anti-oppression and inclusion. The issue of intersectionality must also be looked at in order to broaden and complexify their understanding of identity development.

In an educational context it is essential to set the stage to create an inclusive and equitable environment. According to Sirois, representatives in the field must breed conditions conducive to integration to ensure the development of individuals and communities. Other French-language school boards have paid attention and are diving more deeply in matters of the “diversity of diversity.” ○

Valérie Morand has held the position of Executive Director of National Federation of French-Language School Boards since December 2018. Previously, she served as the organization's communications manager for six years.

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