

Celebrating Inclusive Education Practices in Manitoba Schools

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Exciting things are happening in Manitoba schools! We can see a progression towards inclusive education all across the province and there are some shining examples of school divisions, schools and school leaders who ensure that all students in Manitoba schools are valued for their diversity.

Over the past few months, I've had the wonderful opportunity to visit four schools within Manitoba to speak with parents, students, teachers, educational assistants, and school administration about how they work to include all students in their school communities. I asked each group what practices their school uses to promote a culture of inclusion.

The results have been so positive that I have to share some of them with you... For example: At Dawson Trails School in Lorette, there are the "Gotcha" awards for students, designed to catch them doing good deeds or simply being good school citizens. Education Assistants are involved in a division-wide training program that builds upon their core strengths. This three year program is a big commitment on the part of educational assistants. This year a care-taker from the school is attending the training so that he/she can one day work as an educational assistant within the Seine River school division.

Oakbank Elementary school promotes a strong focus on social responsibility as part of its aim at promoting "pawzitive" behaviour (the school mascot is a lion). This is done with age and grade appropriate projects including a "Big Brother/Sister Club," that matches older students with their peers or with younger students to reinforce classroom teaching, "Da Club," led by the school vice-principal, that promotes social skill development, the "Not in My School" anti-bullying program, and the "Clean-up program" which gets students out of the school and into their community.

At Gillis Elementary School, in Tyndall, the grade 2 class got together to send in a successful application to the "Dreams Take Flight" program on behalf of one of their peers. John Isbister, principal of Gillis Elementary School, is a strong voice for inclusion and his leadership has led to such practices as planning, in advance of a child's enrolment in the school, for their special needs by providing training to educational assistants who have been selected to work with the child upon their enrolment in school.

And finally, at Ste. Anne's Collegiate, in Ste. Anne, Elaine Loughheed, the principal of this high school, was recently awarded a "Yes I Can" award by MCEC for her leadership in inclusive education. This leadership is evident among staff and students at the school. The students at this school, who may or may not be aware of the special needs of some of their peers, make sure that all who want to participate in co-curricular and extra-curricular programming, including student council and sports teams, feel welcomed and are able to do so.

As we proceed in this school year, it is important to remember the many positive examples of inclusion within our own school communities, however big or small those examples may be. I am looking forward to continuing this work over the coming months and look forward to sharing my many discoveries with you along the way!