

Edmonton Public Schools'
DIVISION RECOGNITION
2020–21

HONOURS
AND REWARDS
FALL TO THOSE
WHO SHOW THEIR GOOD
QUALITIES
IN ACTION. — ARISTOTLE



Message from the Board of Trustees

Division Recognition is one of our most cherished and longstanding celebrations. Each year, the Board of Trustees has the privilege of highlighting the outstanding efforts of students, parents, community members and staff. The Board of Trustees would like to congratulate all the Division Recognition Award nominees.

Year after year, we continue to hear stories about all the amazing individuals, teams and organizations that strengthen our Division. The passion, talent, knowledge, motivation, support, creativity and dedication this year's nominees have brought to our Division will have far-reaching and long-lasting impacts on the lives of students, families, colleagues and communities.

When you read through this year's program, you may recognize some of these incredible stories, and may even be directly impacted by them. We hope you find inspiration in all the great things happening in Edmonton Public Schools. Nominees—as we continue to live, learn and work in challenging times, your efforts are appreciated more than ever.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, thank you for all you do to support students, communities and each other. We are so fortunate to have such a fantastic group of individuals who are dedicated to Edmonton Public Schools. Congratulations.



Trisha Estabrooks
Board Chair

Edmonton Public Schools benefits greatly from the considerable contributions made by students, staff, parents and community members. Many people volunteer time, talent and energy that not only exceeds our expectations, but also sets an example for others to follow.

These outstanding achievements and important contributions to Edmonton Public Schools are recognized through the annual Division Recognition Program. There are three types of Division Recognition:

RECOGNITION OF SERVICE honours an individual's outstanding professional and/or volunteer contributions to the life of the school or community. Three recipient categories are recognized each year: parents or community members, students in Grades 7 to 12 and staff members. Nominations are made based on a number of criteria, such as: quality service, commitment and the relationship of the individual's activities to schooling and/or the enhancement of public education.

RECOGNITION OF TEAMS honours outstanding contributions or achievements made by groups through collaborative efforts. Three recipient categories are recognized each year: groups of parents or community members, groups of students in Grades 7 to 12 and groups of staff members. Nominations are made based on a number of criteria, such as: significant contribution, the achievement of excellence through teamwork and the relationship of the group's activities to schooling and/or the enhancement of public education.

RECOGNITION OF MERIT honours outstanding achievement of individuals who have demonstrated a standard of excellence in an area of endeavour. Three recipient categories are recognized each year: parents or community members, students in Grades 7 to 12 and staff members. Nominations are made based on a number of criteria, such as: meritorious, innovative, creative or inspiring achievements, leadership and/or endeavours that have brought distinction to the individual, the school, the community and Edmonton Public Schools.

Recognition of Service

CRITERIA: *To recognize the contributions made to the Division by parents, community members, students in Grades 7 to 12, and staff through professional and volunteer service. Focus is on quality service and significant commitment to the life of the school and/or the education community by an individual.*

STAFF

Laurie Michelson, Balwin

Described as a pillar of the Balwin School community, Laurie is a lead teacher in junior high who works closely with students on programs and activities. Laurie is also a lead English language learner teacher and is known for mentoring new teachers to have successful careers in education.

“She upholds the highest ideals of collaboration, integrity and equity, and exemplifies each in her service to others,” says Christina Jones, Principal of Balwin School.

Laurie’s care and dedication to her students is evident in her commitment to ensuring Grade 9 students had a farewell celebration that met their needs and desires in light of COVID-19 challenges. She worked with students to produce a great celebration of learning that, for the second year in a row, looked very different from the regular in-person celebration with family and friends. Every year, Laurie supports students with fundraising activities, organizing the farewell celebration, developing and sharing meaningful recognition, and ensuring students move on from the Balwin community and into their high school careers with dignity and confidence.

Laurie was a pivotal member of Balwin’s COVID-19 educational plan—her service led to Balwin community’s continued educational success during an incredibly challenging time. Laurie’s commitment to her students saw her move from teaching social studies and physical education, her subject area specialities, to teaching her Grade 7 homeroom all subjects.

Assistant Principal Andy Connelly says, “Laurie is consistently identified as an adult that students feel connected to through their entire schooling career at Balwin. Students talk about how they simply could not have finished school without her.”

Recognition of Service *continued*

Angela Lalonde, Donald R. Getty

As one of the Division's online teachers last year, Angela is being recognized for her dedication, compassion and ability to keep her online Kindergarten class engaged and inspired throughout the year. Teaching a class of five- and six-year-olds in a normal classroom setting can be challenging enough on its own; Angela persevered and helped students thrive both academically and socially while providing a welcoming, safe and inclusive online space.

One of the parents in the classroom, Hishani Mendis, says, "Being an online class, I never thought it would be possible for my daughter to form solid friendships that would go beyond the online classroom. I was proven wrong. Ms. Lalonde did such an amazing job with her students, taking note of who was bonding and making sure they got to be together. Even to this day, my daughter is still close friends with students in her online class who are not attending her school."

Angela is credited for doing whatever it took to make sure students in her class excelled, whether that meant meeting at breaks or after class was done to provide extra help.

Amanda Kokaram-Pacheco, another parent in the class, says, "I witnessed how much Ms. Lalonde genuinely cared for each of the students and made herself available to support in any way she could. If a student needed a little extra help, she would invite them to stay after class and work with them longer. She had tremendous patience and adapted her teaching style to accommodate students' needs."

Erin Frost, Dunluce

Teaching online for a regular class is challenging as it is, but teaching French Immersion to Grade 1 students certainly adds complexity. Erin made it seamless for her online Grade 1 class to make sure her young learners covered both the Grade 1 and French Immersion curriculum.

"I was worried I would have to give my son constant support and attention to succeed online. By October, I was leaving him alone every day to learn, and he thrived in Madame Erin's classroom without needing me to hover and help. My son went back to in-person learning this year and picked up exactly where he left off—and ahead of his classmates in some areas. This simply would not have been possible if we hadn't had Madame Erin as our online teacher last year," says Diana Keto-Lambert, a parent from last year.

Erin is credited by parents in her class for providing a high-quality education and being agile and adaptable in her approach to online teaching.

"Madame Erin consistently kept students' well-being at the heart of her teaching and was able to personalize their learning experiences despite challenges of teaching early learners online," says Jennifer Venance, a parent from last year's class. "Madame Erin was always clear and caring in her interactions with students and parents. She created a beautiful community of learners who looked forward to joining her class every day. She is an outstanding educator."

Nicole Watts, Dunluce

Nicole is described as the angel of Dunluce School by a number of colleagues. She is both a leader in her school and a skilled, approachable teacher to her students. “Nicole can be observed having deep and meaningful conversations with students, helping them problem solve, sharing jokes or discussing various Harry Potter topics,” says fellow teacher Raelene Ronald.

Last school year, she went above and beyond her duties as a teacher by dressing up to engage her online learners and by helping families who had no access to technology or struggled with it. She spends countless hours every month co-ordinating school assemblies, which she has continued to run virtually amidst COVID-19 restrictions. “She spends endless hours preparing the monthly scripts, practicing with students, collecting videos from every teacher...running around to troubleshoot technology on the day of the assembly and making each month different yet fun for everyone,” says Teacher Kathy Han Foo.

When not teaching, Nicole is a sounding board and supportive listener for both students and colleagues. She’s the first to volunteer her time and abilities when there’s an extra role or job that needs doing. “She has an uncanny ability to make every child she connects with feel special. As such, it is common to see Nicole surrounded by a number of students at recess,” says Teacher Matthew Bosch. “There are no limits to her warmth, her compassion and her never ending offers to help others.”

Daniel Manalili, Elizabeth Finch

As Head Custodian of Elizabeth Finch School, Daniel shows the Division’s core values—accountability, collaboration, equity and integrity—in his work and interactions with students and staff every single day.

Over many years, Daniel has earned a reputation as being highly organized and dedicated to the care of the school and to lending a hand wherever it’s needed. “Daniel has high standards for our building, and he inspires all of us to take care of our school,” say teachers Karen Abrahamson and Cindy Pang. “Daniel has also made personal deliveries to our classes, flipped burgers, boiled hot dogs, picked up grocery orders, cut open lockers, cleaned up graffiti, cleaned up after sick students, donned his hazmat suit...and the list goes on.”

With additional COVID-19 cleaning measures, he showed his ability to adapt and excel, creating a safe and clean learning environment for everyone at the school. “Daniel has led our school in safe and proactive measures, going above and beyond on a daily basis,” says Teacher Terri Lyn Staples. “Daniel assists wherever there is a need, willingly and cheerfully.”

Many of Daniel’s colleagues recognize his kindness and ability to connect with students and community members. “Most importantly, though, is the true care Daniel has for the students of Elizabeth Finch. He is often seen talking and laughing with students,” says Principal Kelly Davis. Recently, the school’s Grade 6 students wrote appreciation notes to Daniel. One student wrote, “Once I was talking to Mr. M for just a couple seconds but it made my day better. Without Mr. M, this school wouldn’t feel right.”

Recognition of Service *continued*

Koko Kwan, Forest Heights

Head Custodian Koko has been a constant, comforting presence at Forest Heights for over 30 years. Staff and parents say he always takes pride in keeping the school clean and safe for all. During COVID-19, he has taken extra cleaning and protection measures—parents are comforted knowing Koko is there to maintain as safe a learning environment as possible.

“Koko has played a quiet and assuming, yet bold and steadfast role, in fostering a culture of inclusion, kindness and acceptance, and a community of trust, dignity and respect,” says Jessica Van Der Aa, former alumnus and current parent of students at the school. “Koko has made thousands of students feel seen, supported and cared about.” Jessica shared how 25 years after she graduated, she went to register her two children at her former school. Koko recognized her and even remembered her name. Not too many days later, he greeted her and her boys in the hallway with an old yearbook, taking the time to show her boys photos of her and her brother during their time at the school.

Another parent and alumnus, Christina Dombrosky, shared a similar experience. When her daughter started at Forest Heights a couple years ago, Koko also remembered her and shared yearbook pictures. “This small gesture was so sweet for me, but for my daughter, it brought her comfort and instant trust knowing that Koko knew her mom from a long time ago,” says Christina.

Teacher Karin Konkin says, “Koko connects with young people. From the day new students enter the school, he makes it his mission to learn their names and perseveres until he knows them all by name. Koko makes Forest Heights School a better place. He is an outstanding head custodian, and we benefit from his energy and caring in so many ways.”

Not only is Koko dedicated to keeping the school in great shape, he is always willing to help the staff with their requests, has helped build props and sets for school concerts, and for many years, he has even built “meticulous and much-loved” rocket ships for the Kindergarten students.

Christina says, “Koko greatly contributes to and enhances the life at school for students, parents and staff alike by genuinely caring for the students and doing the best he can to make their experience at school a positive one in a safe and inclusive learning environment. He makes the school seem more like a comforting, familiar home with his friendliness, attentiveness and calming demeanor.”

Herman Chang, Hillview

Herman is a Grade 5–6 teacher who is committed to ensuring every student in his class belongs and makes school a safe place to bring out the best in each of his students. Herman is someone who always steps up to volunteer or take on a new initiative and whose classroom extends well beyond its four walls.

“During my time working with Herman at Hillview, I was always in awe of his quiet, low-key approach to making the school environment great for students and families in our community,” says Jan Reimer Principal Debbie Petkau. “His quiet manner of ‘stepping in and stepping up’ to create a full and rich learning environment for our students had a huge impact.”

Herman seeks to build educational and social experiences that actively engage students at all grades outside the classroom—this has turned into a tradition of experiences that students at Hillview look forward to.

Whether it’s organizing Hillview’s ski club and ice schedule for skating, running an in-line skating program, organizing a virtual ‘Writer in Residence’ program or getting fresh soil for the school’s outdoor garden, Herman makes things happen at Hillview School. He recognizes the importance of providing a range of experiences for all students to shine.

“Herman is one of those unique individuals who has a way of working around obstacles to create amazing experiences that make our Hillview community of students, parents and staff much richer,” says Assistant Principal Della Reimer.

Cheryl Boos, Jasper Place

While COVID-19 presented challenges for schools, it also created many opportunities to reimagine how things are done. That’s exactly what Cheryl did to think of creative ways to celebrate some of Jasper Place School’s largest celebratory events. As the Career and Technology Studies Department Head at Jasper Place, Cheryl not only manages a small team; she also contributes countless hours for many of the school’s major events.

“Cheryl is always positive, enthusiastic, and thoughtful, often sharing her creative ideas with the planning committee,” says colleague Leanne Whitefield. “She is a great role model to students and staff, and she’s simply irreplaceable. It is an honour to work with her.”

Cheryl helped plan the school’s drive-through graduation ceremony last year. From contacting vendors to rolling out the red carpet for graduates, Cheryl was there working with the students to pull off a successful graduation event.

Her creative ideas don’t end there. Colleagues also commend Cheryl’s out-of-the-box thinking for reimagining other important events, like the school’s open house tour and honouring students for their academic achievements. To ensure students were still recognized for achieving honours, honours with distinction and scholarships, Cheryl decided to create a video featuring speeches from teachers and staff who knew the students. The video was shown during a virtual event, and each student received a special gift.

For the school’s open house event, Cheryl helped move the event online. She worked with a videographer to help with the school’s video, presentation, interactive maps and demonstrations. Feedback from students and families was very positive and made them feel part of the Jasper Place community.

School counsellor Darcia Puckrin says, “Cheryl ensures everything done at the school is to the highest standard, and much of the success of major events has only been possible because of the tremendous work Cheryl puts in behind the scenes.”

Recognition of Service *continued*

Megan Fowler, M.E. LaZerte

As a teacher at M.E. LaZerte, Megan has been instrumental in helping to shape the minds and hearts of students. Her work with the school's athletics department has also helped shape some of the school's finest athletes. But perhaps even more importantly, her contributions to help students in any way possible helps enrich many young lives.

"Megan goes above and beyond to help students on a regular basis. She provides extra tutoring, arranges snacks or food packages for students who otherwise would go hungry, and engages students and the parent community for all aspects of our sport activities," says Craig Korte, a fellow teacher at the school.

"The support Ms. Fowler has for her students reaches far beyond the classroom's walls. If she saw your heart was into something, she encouraged you to pursue it," says former student Adriana Atanaskovic. "I credit her for helping me find my place in high school. Having found someone who understood me made leaving high school behind something I didn't look forward to. Leaving meant saying goodbye to someone who made me feel like being me was enough."

Whether it was on or off the field or inside the four walls of the classroom, Megan's love for and dedication to students is what she is known for. Whether it means spending extra time to help students before or after school or lending students resources to help them be successful, Megan is devoted to her students.

"Ms. Fowler helped me grow as a student, an athlete and as a person. I appreciate everything she has done for me, especially the strong work habits that I continue to use every day. She was my teacher, became my friend and helped make my last year at LaZerte one I will never forget," says Kristian Stiefel, a former student.

Carrie Markowski, Menisa

Carrie's classroom is full of energy and creativity, and her students love coming to school. As a Kindergarten teacher for the last seven years, Carrie pushes herself constantly to come up with fun and engaging ways to keep young students learning and loving school, from making a giant cardboard castle to growing gardens in class. "I know my granddaughter had the best beginning to her school journey because of Mrs. M," says grandparent Marian Brandon. "You can see how much she enjoys what she does and how each child is made to feel so important and special."

During online Kindergarten, Carrie created fun videos—of science experiments, outdoor adventures and "Benny the Bear," a stuffed bear always getting into trouble—to keep her students interested outside the classroom.

"What impresses me most about Mrs. Markowski is that she does not just teach the children their ABCs, numbers, and how to share, but teaches them empathy and how to be 'little people with integrity' through carefully planned out experiences," says music teacher Jenny Samm.

Her big Kindergarten graduation and legendary science arcades are something families and the whole school look forward to every year.

Carrie's students wrote notes to share what they love most about her classroom. Here are a few excerpts:

"She helped me read and she helped me count. She is really nice."

"She gives good hugs. She helps me when I fall off the monkey bars."

"When I got hurt, she helped! When I was sad, she helped.
I love Mrs. M. She is awesome!"

"Mrs. M helped me do the monkey bars. She helped me do crafts.
She was a nice teacher."

Jenny Samm, Menisa

For the last four years, Jenny has brought fun, music and movement to the hallways of Menisa School and last year, to the homes of students. Dedicated to teaching music in whatever way was possible last year, she taught students through a “travelling music cart” and made the most of technology to bring people together.

“She has been a leader in creating and editing videos to foster connection between teachers, students, and families at home,” says parent Sarah Knopp. “Despite being unable to sing in music class, Mrs. Samm found new and innovative ways to make music together.”

Throughout the year, she remained focused on student wellness and positive interactions through changing COVID-19 restrictions and shifts to online learning. “There was nothing better in gloomy COVID than hearing my kids laugh from their learning spaces. Knowing that she was so intentional about their educational and mental health needs was so comforting,” says parent Petra Wood.

Outside of teaching, Jenny gave her time to extra-curricular clubs and events. Last year, seeking ways to bring students together in a safe way, she led a running club and gave parents a chance to safely cheer on students in person. “She does an amazing job of keeping the kids interested and engaged in school activities while still allowing parents to be involved in the students’ learning and events,” say community members Aaron and Michelle Kroetsch.

Susan Strebchuk, Norwood

Principal Maureen Matthews and Assistant Principal Sandra MacRae say, “Ms. Strebchuk has been a strong advocate for Norwood School and has contributed in a variety of ways to enrich the community. Her focus on relationships, inclusion, active participation and community has made a significant impact on school life.” The sense of community in Susan’s classroom is apparent. The connections she makes with students is obvious by the many Norwood graduates who come back to visit.

Former Norwood Principal Rhonda Tollefson says, “What I really want to share is how Susan builds a sense of family and community with each student group that she works with. Susan shares experiences from her own life and helps her students connect to each other through their shared experiences. She is an educator who, day-in and day-out, goes over and above to create an environment where students develop a keen sense of belonging, as well as their own stewardship towards others.”

Fellow Teacher Denise Toogood says, “She has been a true inspiration as to what embodies an amazing person and teacher. She has put in countless hours to make her lessons engaging and relatable to ensure the understanding for all of her students.”

Susan has also contributed in numerous ways outside the classroom. To support leadership capacity, she organizes a student leadership council, works with the students at lunch and helps them organize monthly activities for the whole school. For many years, she has run the school’s Free Footie program, which allows Grades 3 to 6 students to be involved in a soccer league outside of school. She also organizes and leads running and reading programs. “The impact these programs have on students is immeasurable,” says Toogood.

In addition to those programs, she’s been involved with organizing the Terry Fox run, runs lunch hour intramurals and delivered holiday hampers. She’s even been known to build an annual holiday feast menu with the students, purchase all of the ingredients, and prepare the food, with help from her students.

Recognition of Service *continued*

Rebecca Patterson, Oliver

Rebecca is described by her colleagues as the “connector” of Oliver School. For 13 years, she has shared her excitement for the arts and love of learning with students from Kindergarten to Grade 9.

Last school year, her ability to connect and bring creativity to daily interactions helped staff and students through difficult times. “Ms. Patterson is an individual who connects us all; the very thread that stitches together our daily connections, celebrations and school culture,” says Teacher Dawn Fowlie. “She will always choose to infuse her contributions with energy, creativity and a passion for teaching that knows no bounds.”

When COVID-19 restrictions made it tough for students to connect, Rebecca created themed daily school announcements, such as “Wonderful Work Wednesday” and “Flashback Friday,” to lift spirits and showcase student work. “Rebecca ensured that, even with so many barriers to connection, that Oliver students and staff were able to stay connected to our families,” says Principal Sheelagh Brown.

Rebecca shows her dedication to being a student herself with her own ongoing learning. “She has become a school leader in video editing and production of materials to engage our learners and has been integral to school operations,” says Teacher Kris Pongratz.

Her positive approach, despite the back and forth between at-home and in-person learning during a pandemic, and willingness to learn from and mentor colleagues has been an inspiration to the staff and students at Oliver School.

Mary Fiakpui, Specialized Learning Supports (for service to Strathcona)

The students and staff of Strathcona School know Mary by her calm and guiding presence. As a social worker, she makes a positive impact on every student she meets, whether it’s to comfort them through a crisis or empower them to take control of a situation.

During a time of crisis at Strathcona School, Mary offered the support and care needed. “Her empathy and kindness in this time of turmoil was invaluable and students and staff were comforted by their conversations with Mary who assured them that whatever they were feeling was right for them,” says Assistant Principal Kelly Reierson.

Students, families and staff seek advice from Mary, and she makes time for everyone, despite her busy schedule. Compassion and respect are at the centre of all her interactions. “With her humanist and cultural perspective to counselling and deep understanding of racial diversity, Mary is a tremendous support for families especially when the social aspects of integration affect the relationship between parents and children,” says Ron Ward, Strathcona School’s Department Head of Student Services.

She also gives her time generously to mentor new colleagues. “Mary spent hours with me, patiently explaining the contextual factors to look for in each case, and modelling how to forge caring relationships with students and families,” says Teacher-Counsellor Robin Woodruff. “The room is calmer when Mary walks in.”

Greg Forsyth, Strathcona

Greg fills many roles at Strathcona High School. Math teacher. Technology lead. Yearbook co-ordinator. School photographer. Media production guru. He does it all with a passion for his work and a focus on instilling a love of learning in students.

“Greg is extremely knowledgeable and organized, allowing students to grow their passion for media, yearbook, video streaming and video production,” says Richard McAdie, CTS Department Head. “Students often comment that Mr. Forsyth makes video production fun during the long hours necessary to complete the tasks.”

Last year, with many COVID-19 health restrictions in place, students and families of the school benefited greatly from Greg’s work in building a world-class audiovisual and technology setup. When health restrictions allowed for athletic cohorts, Greg began streaming intramural games and practices. “Parents have reiterated repeatedly how important these streams have been for their child and families in being able to feel some normalcy in sports and school again,” says Athletic Director Joshua Spronk.

He also put in countless hours to co-ordinate and film the school’s One Acts Festival shows and school musical, shared through a streaming service he initiated and maintains. Greg and his students put their much-needed video production skills to work last year to maintain a strong connection to the school community through changing health restrictions. They produced a welcome video, as well as an open house and graduation video, to name a few.

“It is no exaggeration to say that more than a few parents and students have been brought to tears by the opportunities to watch their child and feel a sense of school community once again,” says Spronk.

Cynthia Yamach, Windsor Park

For the past 11 years, Cynthia has been a beloved Grade 2 teacher who is described as hard working, creative, patient, positive and passionate. Parent Maria Reddy says, “All teachers should be recognized for their vital contributions to our children’s learning and education. But among all these educators, Mrs. Yamach stands out as a teacher who truly goes above and beyond to make a positive difference in the lives of students.”

Parents in the community say she has been instrumental in fostering a passion for learning. “Her love for the children is palpable, and her genuine desire to see them all realize their full potential is what makes her so cherished by every family I know in the Windsor Park School community,” says parent Siminder Soin. “Her calm leadership, her grace under pressure, her patience and her continual desire to seek out the best teaching methods to reach every student, are just a handful of the many qualities I truly admire in her.”

Siminder explains that whether in a school council meeting, a classroom art class, a Zoom meet-the-teacher, or during an Arts or Science Blitz week, she takes on every challenge with a willingness to do whatever is required, and gives 100 per cent.

The week-long Arts and Science Blitz event brings in speakers and presenters to highlight various careers and real-life applications of arts and science for the students. Cynthia has served as the teacher representative on the event organizing committee for many years and devoted countless hours each year to create great experiences for students.

Parent Megan McDougald says, “My children all flourished under the nurturing and loving environment she creates in her classroom. I must admit to being in awe of how effortlessly she keeps the Grade 2 classroom a place of both calm and fun. Grade 2 was the year my husband and I watched our children increase their love of reading, gain confidence in their abilities and grow in independence.”

Her knowledge, dedication and gentle demeanour are appreciated by the entire school community.

Recognition of Service *continued*

PARENT/COMMUNITY

Jennifer Garg, Earl Buxton

Jennifer is a dedicated parent volunteer who created a parent diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) committee at Earl Buxton School. Through Jennifer's hard work and leadership, in just under two years, the DEI committee has had an incredible impact on the school community, parents, teachers and students.

The committee worked on three projects to support student learning and growth. These included an "All About Me" project for students and families to reflect and celebrate how their individual diversity contributes to themselves as learners and to the school community; a monthly book club for students and their families that shares curated resources with the Earl Buxton community; and an Orange Shirt Day project that provided students with age-appropriate information about residential schools and an opportunity to design an orange shirt and reflect on what Orange Shirt Day meant to them.

Not only does Jennifer contribute insightful ideas to engage the school community, she is also hard-working and dedicated to every project. "If someone needs help she is always the first one to offer her assistance. She is very committed to the success of the parent DEI committee and even more so student learning," says parent Claire Blacklock.

"Throughout, Jennifer has demonstrated boundless energy, creativity, innovation, diplomacy, sensitivity and tact. Though DEI committee members have all worked hard to contribute to the work of the committee, without Jennifer and her leadership and passion, there would be no committee to contribute to," says parent Cinnamon Stacey.

Jennifer has shown how initiating small actions in our communities is so important, and the big impact they can have.

Nathan Kern, Jasper Place

Nathan has volunteered as a coach and mentor in the Jasper Place volleyball program for almost 10 years. He has played a significant role in developing the program and has been instrumental in its success, which includes five city championships and three 4A provincial titles.

He works with athletes on and off the court—he instills volleyball skill, knowledge and character in the athletes. Beyond his obvious passion and knowledge of the sport, Nathan's ability to teach and guide players to excel and achieve the best they can is exceptional. Outside of volleyball, Nathan has a great sense of what students need to be great athletes, students and well-rounded individuals.

Nathan brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in volleyball, both as a player and coach at an elite level. Nathan has also served as an important mentor for coaches within the volleyball program—his guidance and support has helped many coaches continue to learn and grow which will benefit young athletes for years to come.

"Nathan is an extremely caring, dedicated and humorous individual who loves giving back to the community what he has learned. I can truly say that Nathan is definitely one of the best coaches in the province and quite likely beyond," says Sid Brandsma, Department Head of Physical Education. "Nathan's passion and love for sport, health, community and student wellness is an inspiration to all of us that get to be around him and learn from him."

Phillip Trott, Parkview

Phillip wears many hats in the Parkview School community. He's a parent, lunchroom supervisor and dedicated volunteer. Phillip gives countless hours every week to serve the school community and is always willing to lend a helping hand on any project around the school.

Described as cheerful and energetic, Phillip greets everyone with a warm smile that is felt even behind his mask. He sets an example for others by demonstrating gratitude, kindness, patience and inclusivity. Students know and respect him—they respond well to his firm but gentle manner when he directs lunchroom and library activity, and the overall bustle in the hallways.

In particular, Phillip's dedication is demonstrated in his service to the school library and learning commons. Phillip spends time and energy considering ways to improve the library to benefit students and staff, like reconfiguring soft seating and bookshelves so that the space is more inviting and keeps students safe in light of COVID-19 measures. He is also designing and building supports to enhance book displays and improve student accessibility in the space using ecologically conscious materials like reclaimed wood.

“Community members like Phil are extremely important to creating and upholding a culture of abundance, where we belong because of who we are and the ways in which we share our gifts, strengths and abilities,” says Assistant Principal Donna McLeod-Huynh.

Nicola Tupas, Rutherford

Nicola's impact at Rutherford School cannot be understated. Described as someone who is uncommonly generous with her time, Nicola has spent countless hours organizing whole school projects, whole community events, supporting school staff during the pandemic and fundraising for a variety of needs across the school.

Nicola shares not only her time, but her talents and expertise all in an effort to enhance the learning experience for students. Nicola has been the parent council fundraising chair for the last three years. So many students have been positively impacted as a result of her fundraising efforts and her commitment to finding grants the school is eligible for. Whether it's a grant for new snowshoes, fundraising for musical instruments, or bringing pride and beauty to the schoolyard through the Happiness Fence project, Nicola's tireless work and dedication to her community is evident.

“At every opportunity that she sees to enhance the experience of our students and to support our staff, she goes beyond the expectations to ensure that maximum support is provided,” says Principal Simon Williams.

During the initial months of the pandemic, Nicola went the extra mile to support school staff. Nicola and her family regularly left inspirational and encouraging chalk messages at the staff entrance, which led to many other families joining in to show love and support.

“Her attention to the needs of others, both big and small, is one-of-a-kind,” says Assistant Principal Alyssa Prouty. “Nicola has made a remarkable impact on our school community.”

Recognition of Teams

CRITERIA: To recognize the contributions made to the Division by a group of parents and community members, the achievement of a significant goal through co-operative group efforts by students in Grades 7 to 12, and the excellent contributions made to the Division by staff through collaborative group efforts. The focus is on co-operation, participation and excellence in performance by a group of people. Achievement or contribution has brought distinction to the group, the school and/or the Division.

STAFF

Division Support Services (DSS) Covid-19 Response Team, Central Services

This team consists of the following members: Laurie Barnstable, Cam Buchanan, Mike Butlin, Trish Clare, Nancy Davis, Donna Forfylow, Gail Haydey, Julie Konanz, Ida Lucila, Natalie Nakonechny, Lisa Richter, Rosa Semaka, Wendy Sorenson, Tracy Symington and Cathy Taylor. This team is being nominated by the principals of five schools—Ellerslie, Greenview, Meyokumin, Ormsby and Sakaw—for the outstanding service they provided during the 2020–21 school year.

One common theme from all nominating principals is that DSS has always provided excellent support and guidance. But, throughout the pandemic, this incredible team went above and beyond. In addition to providing all of their regular support services—school administration support, special needs and student placement support and overseeing student conduct—this team also worked with schools to provide critical COVID-19 contract tracing support.

The pandemic brought many challenges to schools as they navigated shifts between in-person and at-home learning, and maneuvered through periods of quarantine for students, staff, entire classes and sometimes whole schools. Principals and Division leaders were tasked with helping our partners in Alberta Health Services (AHS) contact trace positive COVID-19 cases in our classroom cohorts, schools and Division buildings. “This work would have been unachievable without the unwavering, professional support of the DSS team,” says Sakaw Principal Elizabeth Fraser.

Meyokumin Principal Chet Gosavi says, “This amazing group of individuals supported schools seven days a week. They provided guidance to make sure we followed all the necessary steps required by Alberta Health Services and supplied us with common messaging to inform our families and school when there was a positive case.” These skilled team members were also available to answer principals’ questions and walk them through the process of sharing information with parents.

Principals shared that their phone calls were answered by a calm and reassuring colleague who could either provide an answer or work alongside them to determine the right next steps. Whether the DSS team was helping with a challenging situation or COVID-19 scenario, supporting staff in quarantine, or helping with student placements, they were a constant positive support system.

Ellerslie Principal Tammy Tchir says, “Division Support Services worked alongside other central units including Occupational Health and Safety, Communications and Human Resources to support principals in their work with families and staff. The importance of this cannot be understated as they acted as a conduit for information between schools and central leadership, as well as the wider community.”

Ormsby Principal Crystal Sinclair says, “As a first year principal, I relied heavily on their support. I am in awe of the support, forever grateful and most appreciative of the opportunities to learn from each and every team member this past year.”

“The DSS COVID-19 Response Team is truly a ‘lighthouse’ shining an inspiring pathway forward through these turbulent waves,” says Greenview Principal Les Hansen.

Elmwood Leadership Team

Principal Jeff Neilson and Curriculum Coordinator Lori Anne Ledda make up this duo team.

Principal Neilson jumped into his leadership role as Acting for Principal at the start of a very chaotic school year. He quickly learned COVID-19 protocols and rules, and actively set out to learn about the school community. He immediately began to build relationships with staff, students and families.

Lori Anne worked very hard to ensure that Jeff was well informed about the Elmwood school community.

Teacher Laurie Moreau says, “From the very beginning of the 2020–21 school year, these two individuals were able to create an environment where the staff, students and families of Elmwood felt safe, supported and connected despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. The sense of community that was created in our school despite no in-person staff meetings, no assemblies, and cohorting was palpable.”

Staff referred to them as the ‘Dynamic Duo.’ As a team, they were calm, informative, consistently engaged and available, and kept a positive attitude throughout the year. Elmwood School Council Chair, Tami Hoepfner, says, “In the midst of the largest crisis in our lifetime, where most were falling apart, Jeff and Lori Anne managed to excel. They sparked new joy and excitement in the teachers and staff.” They were always willing to jump in and assist in the classroom or with a student when necessary. Jeff could be seen outside as students arrived and left the school. He also made an ongoing effort to circulate through the school to get familiar with students and classroom styles. Lori Anne used her pre-established relationships with families and students to help support learners both in literacy and with emotional regulation.

Students began to look forward to daily visits from the leadership team. Students would light up when either Lori Anne or Jeff entered the room, and were eager to share something about their day or themselves with them. Teachers say the students felt the authentic, genuine connection that Jeff and Lori Anne created. This, in turn, led to more positive behaviour in the classroom and school environment. The school’s satisfaction survey results showed that families and students felt supported and students looked forward to interactions with the team.

To ensure they continued to engage families, parent meetings were held virtually and were better attended than in previous years. Parents often shared how thankful they were for how the staff at Elmwood continued to go above and beyond to shift to meet new challenges, while keeping children feeling safe, grounded and secure. Staff also appreciated the team approach this leadership team had and they felt appreciated and supported. Teacher Laurie Moreau says, “I am forever grateful for what I learned from both Lori Anne and Jeff as administrators. They both provided me with tools that allowed me to continue to grow and be inspired as a professional.” Teacher Heather Taylor further shared, “The year was one of the best for many staff. This speaks volumes and is a testament to the sense of safety, balance and success that everyone in our building felt throughout what could have been a very different year.”

Recognition of Teams *continued*

Horse Hill Educational Assistants Team

Colleen Forman, Shauna Morrow, Svitlana Oleshchenko, Jesse Ross and Fran Stockard are the members of this team.

Assistant Principal Clair Sprake says, “This team is patient, kind and collaborative. They have gone above and beyond in their work with students, whether in person or online.” The team continuously shows great pride in their school, and works with families and other staff to provide students with what they need to be successful. “Each one of these devoted individuals brings their own skills to the table to enhance the learning opportunities of each child they work with,” says Teacher Tim Hulyk.

As a new principal to the school last year, Nouha El-Ali says, “I was blown away by the dynamic skills this team demonstrated.” They’re known to always have a smile on their faces, and their love and commitment shines through in everything they do. They treat all students and members of the community with the utmost dignity and respect. Families trust in the measures put in place to keep their child academically challenged and emotionally supported.

They are always willing to help with school activities and student events, and also sit on a number of committees in an effort to enrich learning opportunities for students.

Principal El-Ali says, “This team is a pillar of the Horse Hill community.”

Jasper Place Catchment Junior High Math Community of Practice

This team is composed of teachers from multiple schools. They are: Janelle Charney (Hillcrest), Colleen Douziech (Meadowlark Christian), Carolyn Fadden (Alex Janvier) and Jennifer Friesen (Stratford).

This team of incredible educators has voluntarily assumed these lead teacher roles. “They have gone to extraordinary measures to create both a strong guiding team and a highly functioning community of practice since 2019,” says Meadowlark Christian Principal Scott Markine. “They have developed collaborative processes and skills that contribute significant shifts in instructional practice and efficacy.”

They have focused on building relationships, promoting teacher learning and supporting student achievement. They were able to: establish collaborative team norms; administer a survey to measure student perceptions about mathematics; guide all math teachers to agree to use the Part A exam forms created by the Teacher Collaboration Committee on Math to measure and track student computation skills; develop a trusting space for teachers to share and discuss their student’s results; and create opportunities for teachers to share successful instructional strategies as well as continue to investigate new strategies.

These leaders are credited with increasing a sense of connectedness across all junior high teachers in one of the largest catchments in Edmonton Public Schools. Their work continues to drive the efforts of catchment junior high math teachers. Each of them has worked diligently to make sure this collaborative work is accessible virtually throughout the pandemic.

Julia Kiniski Custodial Team

The members of this team are Head Custodian Tyler Coote and Evening Custodian Teresa Omanio.

Tyler and Teresa are described as kind-hearted, flexible, professional and committed. They create positive, collaborative and meaningful relationships with the staff and students. “They both go out of their way to make sure the school is a clean, functional and safe place to be, and they do it with a smile and authenticity of character that is a joy to be around,” says Assistant Principal Mark Goos.

They are solution-based and take initiative to get things done to support students and staff. They can always be counted on to respond quickly and efficiently. They never hesitate to help wherever and whenever needed. “They work continuously to keep the building spotless, but more importantly they make us all feel safe,” says Administrative Assistant Dawn Carver. “They don’t sit still. They are constantly cleaning and always looking for ways to make it even better than it is.”

Principal Sherri Humphrys says, “Both Teresa and Tyler are proud of our building, and this shines through to everyone who visits. They bring a positive attitude and easy-going nature to their role. The high trust our community has in our team brings peace of mind for all that continue to learn and teach within this environment.”

L.Y. Cairns Ability Centered Employment Services (ACES) Team

Assistant Principal Gord King and Construction and Welding Teacher Vaughn Saik are the members of this duo.

Principal Errol Johnson says, “Gord always put the students’ well-being at the forefront of all of his decisions. He consistently goes above all reasonable expectations to ensure that our students have the opportunity to be successful. Vaughn is a natural born teacher who has had a very positive effect on our school. He is tireless when it comes to helping students, parents and colleagues.”

“Gord has worked tirelessly to form a non-profit organization called ACES which is geared towards employment for individuals with special needs,” says Assistant Principal Barbara Cameron. This summer, Gord’s vision came to fruition and he was instrumental in helping obtain a Canada Summer Employment Grant which led to securing summer employment opportunities for 30 students. ACES was able to access grant money coupled with various private donations to create and build a modern Muskoka chair. “Vaughn worked tirelessly to develop the construction processes required for special needs students to safely and efficiently build them,” says Assistant Principal Jeff Bone.

Gord and Vaughn donated their time to work with the students, including the entire summer supervising and managing the construction of the chair, connecting with community partners and mentoring ACES student employees. This resulted in all 150 chairs selling out to appreciative paying customers, the proceeds of which support the ACES program. Principal Johnson says, “By giving the students this opportunity, their confidence has increased by leaps and bounds. Many of the students now see themselves as employable. This aligns with our school vision of having our students gain employment in vocations that bring them dignity and fulfilment as they move forward.” Several students are now employed with other businesses due to the experience and skills developed during their time with Vaughn, Gord and the ACES program.

Recognition of Teams *continued*

L.Y. Cairns Transition Support Program (TSP) Team

The members of this team include Educational Assistant Trinity Chen, Department Head Greg Lessmeister, Educational Assistant Christine Molden and Teacher Susan Sanders.

TSP is a dynamic and innovative program for students who have graduated from the Opportunity program at L.Y. Cairns. These students need extra time and support to become more independent and build employability skills to help them lead more fulfilling lives. The young adults enrolled in the program all have complex learning needs that require dedicated professionals willing to think outside the box and continually nudge clients outside of their comfort zone. “The TSP Team has all of these attributes. Their ability to connect with their clients and guide them toward a future of meaning and purpose is nothing short of extraordinary,” says Assistant Principal Jeff Bone.

Assistant Principal Gordon King says, “Their collective vision, perseverance and belief in their students has allowed them to generate a better future for hundreds of young people. Their dedication to this task knows no limits and they have worked together in such a collaborative atmosphere.”

As the leader of the team, Greg has set up a very successful business enterprise and created partnerships with current businesses, developed new programs, coordinated with community agencies, developed curriculum and liaised with families. Whether it’s running and managing not for profit businesses like car detailing or embroidery, teaching employability pillars within real life contexts, building city transit skills or teaching occupational first aid, the focus is on meaningful experiences that meet essential client needs. Students have the opportunity to learn how to make a variety of products—from woodworking to sewing—then sell them online. Money from sales goes back into the program. Susan brings her creativity by helping the students with sewing and other artistic endeavours. Christine is the face of the program, and is the first person of contact for families as well as the community. Her organizational skills coupled with her innate ability to create connections with exterior partners ensures that the needs of our students are consistently met. Trinity’s interactions with students, and her passion for helping them gain the skills to navigate public transit, have been invaluable. She also comes up with craft ideas that can be created and marketed through the entrepreneurial program.

Principal Errol Johnson says, “The team members demonstrate genuine caring and respect for each person that they work with. They provide every opportunity for our students.” “The work of this team has been truly transformational,” says Assistant Principal Gordon King.

These team members are also very involved in many extra-curricular activities such as the school’s silent auction, Christmas dinner, Future Fair, Christmas hamper program, and student and staff wellness activities.

M.E. LaZerte Counselling Team

This team consists of Student Services Department Head Thomas Gillard, and Counsellors Nicole Drysdale, Paula Millham and Brianne Plewes.

M.E. LaZerte’s counsellors have gone above and beyond their job requirements to ensure their students had every opportunity to be successful throughout a global pandemic. They were relentless in supporting students academically, socially and mentally.

Wellness Coach Lisa Casillas says, “The counsellors demonstrate teamwork and partnership while being compassionate and caring. They make Student Services a place where students choose to come and spend their downtime and eliminate the stigma of reaching out for help.” They delivered food and Chromebooks to students’ homes, worked tirelessly on students’ timetables to ensure they graduated, all while taking care of the mental health of the students and staff at the school.

One parent, whose son needed mental health support, shared how the counselling team has provided continuous compassionate support for her son—helping with everything from adjusting his schedule and safety plan numerous times, to having text and phone conversations that took place both during and after work hours. The parent says, “Helping a teenager with mental health issues is a never-ending exhausting situation for a parent. Having this counselling team on our side has taken some of the burden off of our shoulders and at times been a life saving group.” Another parent of a student with autism and other disorders also shared how this team has provided a safe and supportive space for her daughter. They have helped her daughter move towards graduating, one credit at a time. Parents expressed that they feel the counsellors really listen to students and families, work hard to advocate for what students need and have been an encouraging force for families through many challenging times.

They have also supported staff through both personal and professional challenges, which is not part of their usual job description. “As a team, they have spread joy and love through two extremely difficult school years,” says Casillas.

Recognition of Teams *continued*

Ottewell Community Living Skills (CLS) Team

This team is made up of Teachers Jennifer Adrykowski, Megan Hlewka, Justine McBain and Kara Shennan, and Educational Assistants Janviere Bamurangirwa, Dhruvi Dalal, Melissa Gulka, Maria Makino, Conrado Sevilla and Donna Zittlau. They are regarded as a highly dedicated, compassionate, caring and committed team.

“This team sets the gold standard for working with students with moderate cognitive disabilities,” says Principal Mike Morrison. “What stands out most about our CLS team is how much and how deeply they care for their students.” The school community relies on them to be mentors and subject matter experts, and are often called on to be a pilot school for a new or emerging educational practice. The students and staff in the CLS program build and foster deep bonds with each other. “They work collaboratively to create a positive learning environment for all their students,” says Reading Specialist Marla Pawluik. They take the time to know their students and the best ways to support their varied needs, and all students are respected and valued. “Knowing you have such capable and committed staff like our CLS team, makes running a school just a little bit easier,” says Principal Morrison.

They attend professional development (PD) and community of practice (CoP) sessions to further their understanding of comprehensive literacy and numeracy development, and then weave newfound strategies into their program. “Their passion to embrace new emerging literacy and numeracy has resulted in a drastic change in student learning expectations and experiences,” says Speech Language Pathologist Kacy Moran. The team has also created a culture of camaraderie and mutual support between students, and between students and staff. Moran says, “I have worked especially close with the teachers and educational assistants in their CLS classrooms over the years and have seen firsthand how setting high expectations for students can result in dramatic changes in student learning, classroom culture and hopes for their futures.”

These team members have also taken on leadership roles by presenting at Division PD and CoP sessions.

Parent Choice/Online Learning Team, Central Services

The team members are from various central services departments and include: Trish Kolotyluk (Human Resources), Delia Kuzz (Programming Services) and Bob Morter (Student Information).

For the 2020–21 school year, to alleviate anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Division decided to offer parents four choice points to select in-person or online learning for their children. There were several challenges, the most significant being recording parents' choices, turning those choices into schedules, and then staffing for an average of 29,000 students in a compressed timeline. This team built the process that allowed parents to choose their child's mode of learning each quarter.

They took the thousands of students whose parents selected online learning and scheduled them into their chosen classes using similar processes used to schedule other Division schools. Terry Korte, Managing Director of Technology and Information Management, says, "The scale of this endeavour is what is remarkable. This cohort of online students in EPSB, taken separately, would have comprised the fifth largest school Division in Alberta."

This team critically examined the process each quarter, then built automated structures and refined processes to make each subsequent quarter significantly more efficient. They also did a great job helping to communicate information with schools. They were also supported by dedicated groups within each of their units—a true team effort.

"It is the collective skill and tenacity of this group of professionals that allowed our Division to let parents choose the learning environment they felt was best for their children," say nominators Kathy Muhlethaler, Assistant Superintendent; Angela Anderson, Chief Human Resources Officer; and Terry Korte, Managing Director of Technology and Information Management.

Recognition of Teams *continued*

R.J. Scott Readtopia Team

This duo team is made up of Reading Specialist Consultants Coralie Kerr and Marla Pawluik.

“Coralie and Marla have been instrumental in supporting and advancing the Division’s work around literacy and numeracy for students with complex needs,” says Jana Pedersen, Director of Specialized Learning Supports.

They both have significant training and experience in emergent and conventional literacy. They’ve played a key role in training and mentoring consultants, teachers and support staff who work with these students through a curriculum called Emergent Literacy—which is designed to meet the needs of students who may have barriers to learning and who learn at different rates and different ways.

After attending a session on Readtopia, which is a comprehensive instructional program developed for older students with moderate to severe disabilities, they immediately realized the value it could bring to teachers and students in our Division. They set out to develop a two-year project using Readtopia materials to support interested teachers working in Individual Support Programs (ISP), Community Living Skills (CLS) and Interactions classrooms. Readtopia employs evidence-based approaches to teach English Language Arts and reading as part of integrated curriculum units rooted in meaningful social studies and science topics. Marla and Coralie immediately developed and proposed a two-year project using Readtopia materials to support interested teachers working in ISP, CLS and Interactions classrooms.

“Marla and Coralie provide instruction and guidance on how to use all of the components of Readtopia to ensure a long-term and well balanced educational program,” says Alexis Renwick, Supervisor in Specialized Learning Supports.

Cathie Graves-Evans, Supervisor in Specialized Learning Supports, says, “Marla and Coralie saw a need and responded to that need, supporting 23 teachers across the Division. This will make a significant difference to many students with complex needs, ensuring that our Division will reach its vision of ‘success, one student at a time’ and at the same time, support the Division mission of inspiring student success through high quality learning opportunities.”

Rideau Park Sunshiney Room 5 Interactions Team

This team consists of Teacher Micaela Jordan and Educational Assistants Charlotte DeCicco and Beritt Moysa.

Principal Suzanne Fuller says, “Room 5 is a very special place. Its nickname is ‘sunshiney room 5’ not only because of the beautiful window that welcomes the sunlight into the room each day, but also because of the positivity and joy for learning that emanates from within.”

Micaela, Charlotte and Beritt have complementary skills, communicate clearly and are positive role models. This team continually seeks ways to make their classroom more engaging and find ways to make activities come to life while keeping everyone safe with adaptations. Students feel safe because of the well structured routines and expectations.

Collectively, they treat each individual as if they are the most important student in the whole world. They go above and beyond to connect with each student and their families. They know how best to serve and motivate each student. Principal Fuller says, “This team never rests. They never get stagnant. They are constantly seeking ways to improve their knowledge. They model genuine care for students.”

Parent Halimo Rirash shared that her son used to have a hard time going to school and would often throw tantrums. “Those days are far behind us thanks to these wonderful people,” says Halimo. “They work so hard in so many different areas with our children and push them to exceed their potential. It’s so wonderful to see my son come home in a very happy mood and eager to share what he’s learned in class that day.”

Parent Ayesha Khan refers to this group as “Charlie’s Angels” and the “dream team.” She shared that moving to a new school in a new country with her son who has autism during the pandemic was very overwhelming. Upon taking a tour of the school and meeting the “dream team” her worries were alleviated. She says her son was lucky and was “enveloped in a warm blanket, knowing that he was loved and protected.”

“He thrived under their supervision,” says Ayesha. “They gave my son life skills, made him feel self-assured, and made him feel like he could do it all. That is a very rare gift. I will be forever indebted for their service.”

Recognition of Teams *continued*

Ross Sheppard Social Justice Committee

The lead members of this team are Department Heads Angela Hernandez and Rustam Sardarli, and Teachers Zuhur Good, Derek Horneland and Marina Marshall.

This committee has worked in collaboration with students, staff and stakeholders to create and foster a more informed and inclusive approach to teaching and learning. Principal Rick Stanley says, “I am touched by the endearing qualities of our Social Justice Committee as they strive to make us better.” To support their own professional learning, they pursued certification in restorative justice, Go-To Educator training and safe contact training. They continued their learning through an Anti-Racism Community of Practice, and reading and discussing various written works.

They worked collaboratively to establish school-wide events that support awareness of Black History Month, Pride Month, Women’s History Month, and Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women. World cafés were facilitated in public spaces to allow any student to engage in important and dynamic conversations with their peers. This team also worked on a targeted level to support Ross Sheppard’s catchment feeder schools, facilitated professional learning for staff and created awareness campaigns for students. The team also supported conversations with students who had experienced or been involved in racist, homophobic and other discriminatory incidents.

Former Rosslyn School Principal Tammy Tchir shared how their school had been supported by this team in the past. Tammy says, “They spent time with our administration team creating a plan to work with our school community and also provided valuable resources. This support was invaluable.”

Inglewood School Principal Kerry Kotyshyn echoed their school’s gratitude for the support the committee provided their school and the greater Woodcroft community. “They have helped allow the community to come together and develop a deeper understanding of the term inclusion and how it applies to all marginalized individuals.”

School council chair Shauna Gibbons says, “They worked tirelessly in a pandemic to engage parents interested in being allies, and assisted our efforts to create and translate an inclusive welcome to all families attending Ross Sheppard.” She shared that this team was instrumental in helping the school council host a Bystander Intervention training workshop that generated deep and meaningful discussion.

Westbrook Grade 1 Team

This team is composed of Teachers Morgan Klevyer, Rebecca Robins and Arlene Walker.

Parents describe this incredible team of teachers as caring, positive, enthusiastic, collaborative, skillful, hard-working and very organized. They are innovative and creative, and find unique ways of motivating students by setting up projects, activities and games to spark students' interest.

Parent Chandni Handa shared that with the shift to online learning due to COVID-19 restrictions, the lessons were well planned, material supported for learning was appropriate and efforts to facilitate learning was paramount. To ensure, each child got one-on-one reading time, they supported parents with interactive websites to keep them busy and encourage learning.

These teachers worked together to create one overall Grade 1 syllabus. Every day, whether online or in class, all of the Grade 1 students were doing the same work. They also had packages filled with future work that were sent home a couple times throughout the year to be ready in the event of a shift to at-home learning.

Every morning the students were greeted with happiness and warmth by one of the three teachers. During a very unusual time, this was huge for the Grade 1 students, along with their parents who were unable to come into the school to help them feel comfortable. Parents shared that throughout the year, there were little extras to make the year special, whether it was first day photos taken and emailed home or a "Christmas concert" featuring students outside in masks that was filmed for parents to enjoy.

"The ability to shift between in-person and remote schooling was remarkable," says parent Kavita Bhanot. Over the course of just a couple of days, all Grade 1 teachers arranged a complete course of work for the students during the shift to at-home learning last winter. Kavita says, "Despite the relatively short notice, I did not sense that my child was falling behind in his coursework."

"I can only imagine this past year would have been one of the most stressful years for the teaching profession," says parent Nicole Etcheverry. "I commend these three teachers for their ability to adapt and work cohesively together to make the year enjoyable and seamless for the students."

Recognition of Teams *continued*

DIVISION STAFF AND PARENT/COMMUNITY

L.Y. Cairns Indigenous Education Committee

The members of the team are: Elder Phillip Campiou; Assistant Principal Mark Edey; Assistant Curriculum Coordinator Hien Lu; Teachers Katherine Hendry, Dayna Leskiw Der, Henry Quaye, Anna Sorochan, Victoria Stusiak, Glenda Thiel, Niki Wiese, Melania Woloszyn, Sarah Worth and Erin Yaschuk; and Educational Assistants Forbi Hirwood Besong and Angie Maris.

This dedicated team is being recognized for their hard work to support students and staff in deepening their understanding and appreciation of Indigenous history, cultures and protocols. This talented group creatively organized several Indigenous events and celebrations virtually last year. By thinking outside the box, they found innovative ways to host a virtual Orange Shirt Day assembly, a virtual Indigenous cultural celebration during Culture Days and an Indigenous Games Week at L.Y. Cairns School.

“Our Orange Shirt Day assembly was a result of this team’s wonderful collaboration and involvement from our students and staff,” says Principal Errol Johnson. “It was a wonderful reflection of knowledge our school community has acquired and was a direct reflection of this team’s incredible work.”

The school received a grant through Alberta Culture Days to host an Indigenous cultural celebration that the school hosted in collaboration with the greater community. Community members, Elders, dancers, singers and storytellers worked together to showcase different Indigenous cultures.

The Indigenous Games Week was a “smashing” success and was also led by this talented team. The group worked with students at the school to plan a variety of Indigenous games. With extra COVID-19 protocols in place, the team helped coordinate groups of students to help ensure all equipment was cleaned and sanitized between uses.

With many students at the school identifying as First Nations, Métis and Inuit, the team also contributes learning opportunities throughout the year to help students and staff learn, including a website filled with Indigenous information and resources.

“This committee deserves to be recognized for the dedication and for tirelessly providing ongoing learning opportunities for staff and students to develop an awareness and appreciation for Indigenous culture,” says Assistant Principal Barbara Cameron.

PARENT/COMMUNITY

A&H Steel, service to Lauderdale

The key members of this team are Brad Freeman and Heather Scott, and former Edmonton Public Schools' teacher Glenise Harvey.

These three members, along with employees at A&H Steel, have significantly contributed to the school community by providing indoor shoes, winter boots and coats, classroom supplies and books, and holiday hampers for students and families at the school. They also provided breakfast every Friday for a month last year and sent an ice cream truck to the school's year-end track meet so each student could enjoy a treat.

Recognizing the incredible pressure and stress staff were feeling last year with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, A&H Steel arranged to have individually-wrapped red velvet cakes and cookies dropped off for teachers for some extra cheer.

"Sometimes when times are difficult or unpredictable, kindness goes a far way and gives worth to individuals," says Principal Allison Barber. "We are forever grateful for our connection to A&H Steel for their contributions to our community."

Beyond their generous contribution of items, employees at A&H Steel also were involved with the school community by participating in READ IN Week and writing letters and notes to students throughout the year.

Curriculum Coordinator Lyndsey Smith says, "A&H Steel made a true difference in the lives of our students and staff. I wish every school could have a partnership like the one we have with them. I'm forever grateful for the difference they've made in the lives of our students with their incredible generosity and kindness."

Forest Heights School Council & Friends of Forest Heights Parent Society

The parent members of this combined team are Geneva Espegel, Sylvia Harte, Anna Krall, Elissa Nys, Mary Parsons, Matthew Parsons, Julia Price, Alison Puffer, Sonya Salisbury, Jacqueline Smith, Jill Tucker and Kathleen Wolff.

Principal Nicole Schmidt says, "These individuals have made significant contributions to improve school experiences for our student population and have positively enhanced public education experiences for our school community, even in the midst of a global pandemic."

"We are so fortunate to have such an active parent community at Forest Heights," says Administrative Assistant Karen Janke. "Every year they are involved in so many activities with their gift of time and financial support." As a result of their contributions, students are given so many opportunities and resources they may not otherwise have—like the chance to master the bunny hill for the first time by participating in school ski day, checking out the latest books from the well supported library, using math manipulatives in their homerooms, or enjoying school-wide special performances (like Alberta Opera) and guest speakers. They cover all field trip fees, including busing. These parents also volunteer countless hours organizing annual school-wide celebrations such as Oktoberfest, Community Christmas and Spring Fling.

One of their huge undertakings in the past few years has been fundraising for a new playground. They have already raised \$126,000 through writing grants, soliciting donations, doing bottle drives, and organizing silent auctions and other fundraisers. They hope to break ground in the next two years.

Music Teacher Patrick Hughes says, "Even through the challenges of COVID-19, they have worked to maintain high community engagement and high attendance at monthly parent council meetings. They have grown a large team of parents who support our school."

"We are extremely grateful for this outstanding team of individuals," says Principal Schmidt. "Their acts of volunteerism bring our school culture and school spirit to life."

Recognition of Teams *continued*

Friends of Fraser

The members of this team are Julie Aloisio, Jessika den Otter, Liz Kalisvaart, Vicky Leacock, Alix Neilson and Christine Samsoniuk.

Friends of Fraser has been an integral piece of the Fraser School culture for over 40 years. “In my time as a staff member for over 30 years, the one consistent shining light has been the incredible group of parents that make up Friends of Fraser,” says Head Custodian Gord Flatt. Gord shares that with COVID-19 protocols in place, staff and students miss having these parents around the school on a daily basis. Even so, aside from their ongoing financial support, their physical presence is still felt through the subtle things they do like giving a friendly wave or writing welcoming and encouraging messages outside the school with chalk.

This group has been a constant support for funding field trips, hot lunches, and numerous purchases such as library books, music instruments and Chromebooks—all to the benefit of students. Teacher Arlee Alton also shared, “These parents have been a welcome presence in our school.”

“Staff, students and the community benefit from having a strong, caring and committed parent group,” says Teacher Heather Kennedy. “They have helped to build connections between the school and community by reaching out to community members to invite them to things like Remembrance Day assemblies and Kikosewin (an Indigenous-focused community building event). Our school is what it is because of the valuable time and effort these parents put in. We are lucky to have them.”

Steele Heights Baptist Church Team, service to M.E. LaZerte

This team involves numerous volunteers and is represented by Senior Pastor Darren Platt.

The church has been a partner with the school’s Student Services department for several years. Pre-pandemic, they generously supported a weekly breakfast and elevated it from financial support, to providing volunteers and then to even providing live entertainment.

During the pandemic, some of the school’s families identified that they were struggling to provide food due to the pandemic. School administration created family hampers using food purchased for school programs that could not be used when the school was closed. However, groceries were lacking key items to complete the hampers such as vegetables and fruits. After a brief discussion with Pastor Platt, the Steele Heights Baptist Church team agreed to support and assist. “Overnight, they secured a \$10,000 cash donation, a truckload of produce from Sobeys,” says Department Head Julian Pacholik. They also provided volunteers and the space to assemble and deliver food hampers to families every week for months. “The thing that amazed me the most was that they didn’t want any recognition letting people know about their huge involvement,” says Julian.

“Steele Height Baptist Church is a true example of community contribution and care in action,” says Wellness Coach Lisa Casillas. “Without the church, our school would not have been able to support our families in need.”

“They have contributed their time, labour and love and are true community stewards. They have been community leaders when people needed them the most and I am proud to recognize them for Division Recognition,” says Thomas Gillard, Department Head of Student Services.

Youngstown e4c Nutrition Program Team

This team is made up of parent and community members Alison Dix, Maggie Morrill and Damon Wong.

Thanks to e4c sponsoring Youngstown's nutrition program, students are provided with daily healthy breakfast and mid-morning snacks to eliminate the barrier of hunger as it relates to learning.

As both a teacher and a parent at the school, Nicole Webb says, "It is easy to see the dedication that Alison, Damon and Maggie have for the nutrition program. They work tirelessly to create a safe and healthy environment for our students. This program is so critical and appreciated by all in our community."

"From the initial pre-COVID iteration of the morning snack program to the current model of the 'individually packaged items' version, Allison, Damon and Maggie provide unwavering work ethic and commitment to our school," says Principal Jason Dolezal. "Their adaptation to new COVID-19 protocols and food safety expectations allowed this program to continue seamlessly at Youngstown. In addition to their adaptation, they are also great with our students!"

"They adapted with a positive attitude and always a smile," says Curriculum Coordinator Jacqueline Butlin.

Not only does Youngstown benefit from their hard work—Mayfield School does too. For the 2021–21 school year, they prepared over 22,000 meals between the two school sites. Mayfield Principal Jennifer Lesko also noted how excited her students were to interact with these team members and how appreciative she was that the program adapted during the pandemic.

Recognition of Teams *continued*

STUDENT

Old Scona Life Long Learners

This team is made up of students Sanaa Bhaidani, Simran Dhaliwal and Sameen Sadaf.

Former Old Scona International Baccalaureate (IB) Coordinator Loretta Ng, explained that these team members wanted to give back to their former elementary and junior high schools, and subsequently partnered with five different schools: Allendale, Edith Rogers, Kate Chegwin, Mount Pleasant and T.D. Baker.

Last year, as Grade 11 students enrolled in the full IB program at Old Scona, they were required to complete a CAS (creativity, activity, service) project where they worked in a group to help develop collaborative and teamwork skills. They chose to spearhead a virtual tutoring and mentoring project, called Life Long Learners (LLL), to safely meet the needs of students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Loretta says, “They worked tirelessly to create LLL and displayed outstanding communication skills, identifying their goals and team norms, drafting advertisements and emails to schools, creating letters that were shared with each school community and sent home to parents and students, and designed a tutoring program on a virtual platform using Google Meet. These three hard working young women recruited over 50 students at Old Scona to volunteer as tutors, organized orientation, presentations and tutor training sessions on evenings and weekends to teach their peers how to tutor, mentor and establish rapport with paired tutees.” In total, 60 Division students benefited from the tutoring.

Mount Pleasant Principal Laurel McEwan explained that this team helped students with: the four core subjects and French; building and growing connections; creating a safe space to use different resources to make learning enjoyable; and mentoring students with transition to junior high. Principal McEwan says, “Students and parents were engaged, supportive and appreciative of having access to this free tutoring program.”

Edith Rogers Curriculum Coordinator and Counsellor Christina Woodbridge shared that the team members were respectful, professional and organized. Families were provided choice for their preferred tutoring time and day, tutors reached out and worked with teachers to ensure their tutoring materials were effective, and tutors also reached out to families to encourage any absent students to attend. Christina says, “They contributed to the life of our school.”

Based on what they learned last year, they refined their project and created new processes to enhance engagement and communication between tutees, their parents and the tutors for this school year.

Loretta Ng says, “Their commitment and dedication to improving student learning and well-being has enhanced student engagement and increased accessibility to supports and resources.”

STUDENT/DIVISION STAFF

Strathcona Improv Team

This combination team consists of Fine Arts Department Head and Improv Coach Linette Smith, and Improv captains Karissa Affolder, Grace Fitzgerald and Dabi Kim.

Principal Hans Van Ginhoven says, “COVID-19 dramatically changed how we educate students and how schools operate. This was particularly true for the arts. Linette and her team met this challenge head on.” They were adaptable, creative and persistent.

This team found a way to have multiple participants online, a way for those participants to recognize prompts and hints, and then over time after a lot of practice, they worked out the complex logistics of adding in an audience.

Assistant Principal Natasha Shewchuk says, “They created at-home studios and developed online Zoom groups to run their drills and coach their teammates. They also worked tirelessly to develop new games that would engage the audience, tantalize emotions and create interactivity in this new environment. Without question, they were leaders in this sphere and without question, their success was derived from their cohesive, collaborative and compassionate leadership.”

They won gold in the first ever online Nosebowl (city improv championship), finished second in the Northern Alberta Improv League and won gold at the Canadian Improv Games. They also participated in the improv panel for the Magnet Theatre in New York City, were leaders of the Improv Night for junior high students and were hand-selected for an Improv Jam with students from Slovenia.

“To someone who watched the performances from home, Strathcona’s young actors made the tournaments and the competitions look effortless,” says Cheryl Chetkiewicz, parent of a graduate. “As the parent of an aspiring actor, I know they spent many hours perfecting their games and skills while maintaining the necessary connectivity and energy needed to deliver their performances. Through it all, I heard nothing, but laughter, friendship and team-building.”

“Given the pandemic, the almost magical successes of the Improv Team are something I will not forget,” says Principal Van Ginhoven. “The competitions provided a bit of light during dark times.”

Recognition of Merit

CRITERIA: To recognize the outstanding achievement or exemplary performance of an individual parent or community member, student in Grades 7 to 12 or Division staff member who has demonstrated a standard of excellence in an area of endeavour. Focus is on achievements, leadership or contributions that are meritorious, innovative, creative, or inspiring and have brought distinction to the individual, the school, the community and the Division.

STAFF

Tamara Heemerck, Alex Janvier

Administrative Assistant Tamara Heemerck was an invaluable asset last spring during the consolidation of four west end schools into the new Alex Janvier School. Tamara was appointed to help Principal Robert Smilanich get the new school ready to welcome students in September 2021. Colleagues describe her as dedicated, energetic, professional, personable, incredibly hard working, generous, a good communicator and having a great sense of humour.

Principal Smilanich explained that her hard work started with the painstaking task of taking inventory of existing resources at the four closing schools to see what could be used in the new school. She then coordinated purchasing any needed resources from multiple budgets, to ensure staff and students had what they needed to get off to a great start at the new school. She was able to navigate the complexities of working with four schools, all while also helping out with the new Aleda Patterson School and continuing her full duties at Sherwood School. Assistant Principal Shelley Kofluk says, “Tamara has gone above and beyond. She took the time and care to engage with staff at all schools and in all departments to ensure that financial resources were used effectively. She went above and beyond to verify inventories and visit each site along with the various stakeholders including Division staff overseeing the project.”

For the new Alex Janvier School, Tamara also handled a myriad of responsibilities including the registration process, managing finances, and monitoring the school email account and other communications

Due to Tamara’s efforts and fiscal responsibility, the new school started the year with significant resources in reserve, to be spent on emergent needs. “I honestly cannot imagine what it would have been like to open the school without her support,” says Principal Smilanich. “I trust her completely. I will be forever grateful for the direct leadership she provided to most of the physical aspects of the consolidation.”

Curriculum Coordinator Joanne Olsen says, “Tamara’s people skills are exceptional and her responsiveness is to be commended. Our families are fortunate to have Tamara as the first point of contact as they call or enter our school. Without exception, Tamara puts students and their families first. She’s able to deal effectively with a variety of personalities, including the most complex, in a calm and professional manner. She makes every effort to learn the circumstances of each family and utilizes that information to facilitate support for them—like coordinating and shopping for food hampers for families in need.”

Assistant Principal Kofluk says, “I am astounded by her generosity in always looking for ways to provide more for our students and families.”

Sarah Ferrante, Balwin

Sarah is a teacher who inspires change and those around her to work to better the community. Assistant Principal Andy Connelly says, “She demonstrates her commitment to the community through her leadership and dedication every single day. She is truly an inspiration.”

During Sarah’s time at Balwin School, she has created, led and developed a number of initiatives that have built a strong learning community based on diversity, equity, rigour, relevance and relationships.

Sarah has brought together the northeast Edmonton community around events and initiatives like Shadow Day, Family Nights for Reconciliation, the URStrong Conference and the Annual International Day for the Elimination of Racism Conference—an impressive endeavour with over 200 students and 20 speakers.

These events brought students together in a spirit of co-operation and had a profound impact on building leadership in Balwin students. Sarah’s capacity to inspire others and be a changemaker in her community is evident through these powerful events and initiatives.

“Sarah is a strong teacher who gains the admiration of other teachers and respect of her students. I leave her room wondering how she does it. Sarah is mighty and fierce. She can make anyone in the room listen and always stands up for what is right. She remains professional and constantly works to better her teaching,” says Teacher Chanelle Cluett-Alstad.

Janet Tonin, Bessie Nichols

Janet is a committed teacher who values her students and their families. Described as innovative, passionate, enthusiastic and caring, Janet makes learning fun for her students. From inspiring creativity in her students to creating an engaging and supportive environment for students during periods of online learning, Janet’s dedication to putting her students first is evident.

“It speaks volumes when previous students talk to her in the hallways and when families request Janet to teach their other children,” says Teacher Laura Andruik.

Janet also demonstrates her passion for teaching and learning through her collaborative approach to managing her classroom. “Janet showed me how much she valued every child in the class, recognized their areas of strength and growth, and even referred to herself as the ‘mamma duck’,” says Fatma Ayikli, a student teacher. “Janet demonstrated an excellent role model figure for what kind of teacher I want to be in the future.”

“I do believe that Janet’s teaching will have a lasting impact and influence on students’ lives,” says Educational Assistant Dawn Mamer. “I have been so inspired by her continuing dedication to putting children first.”

Recognition of Merit *continued*

Matt Burrows, Jasper Place

Matt is a teacher, coach and leader in the Jasper Place School community. Described as a compassionate and caring team player, Matt serves as a role model to all those he coaches and teaches.

“His ability to make personal connections with students is uncanny and is worthy on its own for an award. His students feel welcomed, cared for and respected, but understand they will be challenged daily to be the best person they can be,” says Assistant Principal Rob Ennis.

Over the last five years, Matt has spearheaded the annual Jasper Place Bike-a-Thon in support of the Make-a-Wish Foundation. With hundreds of student and staff participants and many volunteers, he has helped raise well over \$500,000 to grant 72 critically ill children their wishes.

Matt served as the Athletics Department Head for a number of years and, through extensive collaboration with teacher and volunteer coaches, has created an atmosphere of athletic excellence at Jasper Place. He has coached many teams throughout his time including senior and junior football, senior and junior basketball, cross country, golf and has served as the teacher sponsor for other teams. Through his guidance and leadership, the coaches he works with respect him and share the same values—to instill a love for sport and respect for sportsmanship in students.

“Matt is one of those teachers who truly has and will continue to make a difference in the lives of his students and our school,” says colleague Dusty Freimark.

Jessica Bolt, Kameyosek

Jessica is a teacher at Kameyosek School. She is the school’s lead teacher for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education and their 2SLGBTQ+ Safe Contact. Jessica is a dedicated ally to both of these communities. She has devoted countless hours to professional development, learning how best to support these students. She also keeps up to date on Board policies and makes sure they are implemented in the school.

The whole community benefits from Jessica’s tireless work. She has created and implemented a detailed school plan to support First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students, which has been used as a working document by other schools. And she has invited many Elders, dancers, singers and other Indigenous storytellers and Knowledge Keepers to share their stories and experiences with students. She always makes sure to know the proper protocols so these visitors are honoured and compensated for their time in a culturally appropriate way. She has also become an expert in teaching about difficult subjects like residential schools to even the youngest learners.

As Safe Contact for the 2SLGBTQ+ community at Kameyosek School, Jessica has created a welcoming and inclusive environment for staff, students and their families who may be part of that community. Jessica has marched in many Pride Parades with Edmonton Public Schools and provides grade-appropriate lessons to students and staff in the lead-up to Pride Week.

Jessica’s fellow teacher, Kathryn Hassink, says, “She is continually building and sharing her knowledge with both students and staff and promotes inclusivity in every one of our schools’ classrooms. Jessica has organized several learning sessions for staff to share resources, she has worked to fill our library with appropriate books, and she coaches staff in how to appropriately present and discuss [these topics] with their classes.”

Veronica Sirtonski, Kameyosek

Veronica Sirtonski is an educational assistant, library technician and lunchroom supervisor at Kameyosek School. In addition to these roles, she is an active parent volunteer, serving as parent council treasurer. Veronica is known as someone who is always willing to lend a helping hand, often going well beyond her job description to help students, staff and parents in the school community.

While she was initially hesitant to take on the role of library technician four years ago, having never done that type of work before, Principal Hector Pothier says, “I knew, and Veronica proved me right, that she would transform the geographic centre of our school into the showpiece and hub for student learning that it was meant to be.”

As an educational assistant, Veronica works mostly with Kindergarten and Grade 1 students. But she is known throughout the school community as someone who will jump in and help wherever she is needed. For many years, she has supported the Grade 6 farewell ceremonies and she often gives up her break time to allow students in the school makerspace a few extra minutes to build and play with the materials they’re working on.

Whether she is working one-on-one with students who need extra support or leading school-wide projects, Veronica gets things done. Colleague Christina Gaber says, “Veronica always goes far above and beyond her daily tasks. She frequently says ‘we can find a way to solve this’ and ‘we can make this work.’ The word ‘no’ is not in her vocabulary. Her dedication, energy, positive attitude, dependability, flexibility and efficiency are beyond words.”

Stephanie Madryga, Londonderry

Stephanie has a unique passion and skill in using technology to help students succeed. Over the last year and a half, she has taken an innovative approach in her classes, and has helped her colleagues do the same with their students. “She is constantly implementing innovative ways to teach Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) as well as finding effective technologies to help navigate through the school year, especially during this pandemic year,” says fellow teacher Lena Truong.

When the school shifted to online learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Stephanie was ready and willing to help her colleagues learn and teach using Google Classroom and other existing resources. “As we were reeling with where to start last March [2020], Stephanie suggested that we adapt resources offered through Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC) and walked the science team through the process of getting to the resource,” says Teacher Van Tong.

Most importantly, students in Stephanie’s classes benefit from her commitment to innovation and lifelong learning in her teaching. “She has used robotics, coding, maker spaces...and a host of other new technologies to teach not just practical science concepts, but also problem solving, collaboration and 21st century learning skills,” says Ryan Bolichowski, Curriculum Coordinator.

In fact, next year, Londonderry students will have access to a brand new robotics program in no small part because of Stephanie constantly championing new technology in her school.

Recognition of Merit *continued*

Mary Ann Dobson, Mount Royal

In the three years that Mary Ann Dobson was the principal at Mount Royal School, she showed true servant leadership with generosity and thoughtfulness, and went above and beyond for the school community at every turn.

Mary Ann, now the principal at Minchau School, guided the Mount Royal School community through the school closing and the pandemic with grace, creativity and care.

Mary Ann's unique gifts as an artist and her commitment to arts education saw her take on many creative initiatives to further build the school's Arts Core program. This included curating staff art collaboration pieces, bringing in guest artists and securing funding to have a loom in the hallways which allowed for a school-wide collaborative art piece. When classes were moved online, she organized a living art project where students, families and staff took pictures of themselves recreating famous paintings.

Mary Ann also worked to create an outdoor classroom in collaboration with the local parents association and school council. This allowed many students to continue to learn and interact in a safe outdoor environment. The fence around the outdoor classroom became a place to display art and photos, and at the end of school year it was used to display a farewell slideshow, which was a creative and beautiful way for the school community to say goodbye to their school.

Not only does Mary Ann care deeply about student success and connecting with families, she invests in her staff. "Mary Ann is exceptional at showing gratitude and appreciation, and all staff felt that through the years," says Tim Paetkau, Assistant Principal at Rideau Park School. "Homemade cards, small gifts, words of encouragement, food, treats are Mary Ann's love language."

Mary Ann inspires all those around her to kindness, generosity and creativity. "When I encounter a difficult situation, I often think—what would Mary Ann do? The answer is inevitably to listen, assume the best in people, make sure that others feel included, let others know that they are appreciated, have a sense of humour, be honest and generous," says Highlands School Teacher Stephanie Johnson.

Tim Paetkau, Mount Royal

Tim is a multi-talented, beloved educator. As the assistant principal and music teacher at Mount Royal, Tim taught every student in the school and supported every staff member and parent. Tim, now Assistant Principal at Rideau Park School, is described as being approachable, inclusive and collaborative. Tim was always ready to jump in with whatever needed to be done and was a visible presence in the school—whether wearing his famous Christmas sweater (that grew more bells and whistles every year) or teaching music with his beloved puppets, he was always encouraging and joyful.

Tim's commitment to building strong relationships is evidenced in the way he relates to those around him and leads with love. He always puts students at the centre of every decision and prioritizes people.

Navigating the changes throughout the last school year, Tim created and revised supervision schedules and tirelessly worked out systems to address changing expectations and protocols to keep the school community safe. Tim also took extra steps to track academic progress for the school's online students and facilitated conversations with online teachers assigned to various schools in the city. Tim coordinated holiday hampers for families in need and through the pandemic, when family needs increased, he coordinated bi-weekly hampers.

As a creative and innovative music teacher, Tim led and produced Mount Royal's yearly spring productions, led carol sings, wrote school songs for the Grade 6 farewells, applied for grants for the school's artist in residence programs and invited community artists to join the F4ME (Fine Arts for Me) Day. Tim even took his music class "on the road" during the pandemic when students were unable to use the music room.

"His sincerity, humour and care brought stability and hope to families, especially in a difficult time of pandemic and school closure," says Mary Ann Dobson, Principal at Minchau School. "Our school culture was healthy, supportive and creative in large part due to Tim's leadership."

Recognition of Merit *continued*

Gerald Chung, Old Scona

Gerald is a well-loved and respected teacher at Old Scona. In his three years at the school, he has shown true excellence in teaching and a dedication to student success both in and out of the classroom.

As a computer science teacher, Gerald spends countless hours coming up with ways to make learning engaging and fun. His enthusiasm and dedication shows that he loves what he teaches—he works tirelessly to pass that passion on to all his students. “He has truly inspired all of his students, myself included, to achieve greater and further heights in the future,” says former student Alexander Cai.

Outside of the classroom, Gerald’s leadership and dedication has brought recognition to Old Scona students at the provincial, national and international level. He has supervised, led and coached the student teams in the CyberTitan competition, Skills Canada and Skills Alberta competitions, all to resounding success. In 2020–21, two Old Scona teams placed in the top 10 of the CyberTitan National Finals, including an all-female team. Out of over 430 students who participated in the Skills Alberta competition, five Old Scona students won medals in their respective categories. Gerald put in an extraordinary amount of time into organizing practice rounds, coaching and mentoring, supervising teams during each round of the competition and coordinating these enriching opportunities for students.

At the heart of it all is Gerald’s commitment to students and their success. Under his leadership, students have excelled in the competitions they’ve entered. Many students he mentored through CyberTitans or taught computer sciences have gone on to top universities in Canada and the United States to pursue computer sciences and other disciplines. “Regardless of the medals, accolades and distinctions, Mr. Chung genuinely cares about teaching and inspiring his students,” says parent and Chair of Old Scona Academic School Council, Maricel Reddy.

Shama Jomaa, Parkallen

Shama is a gifted educator—one who cares deeply about her students and her teaching. She creates a safe space for all students in her Grade 4/5 class to flourish while giving thoughtful individual attention so every student knows they are heard and they belong.

Shama’s class is an engaging place to learn because of the effort and imagination she brings to every detail. From classroom set-up (which includes a Harry Potter Platform 9¾ corner) and impressively produced videos like a virtual meet-the-teacher, to creatively using classroom props and designing inventive assignments, students thrive in their learning.

Shama’s love and dedication to her students is evident from the way students and families are quick to share their deep appreciation and awe for the work she does.

“Ms. Jomaa is an exceptional educator who creates lifelong impacts on the students she teaches. She does this by creating a safe space to challenge students to become the best versions of themselves,” says parent Jessica Buckwold.

Ayana, a previous student, says, “Ms. Jomaa will always hold a special place in my heart. She has worked hard over her many, many years and really deserves recognition. It’s the least we can do for her. I have never had a better teacher and I never will.”

During the pandemic, Shama didn’t miss a beat. She created a safe and inspiring classroom despite the challenges students and families faced, and expertly re-established a sense of normalcy and predictability in her online class. With calm, competent modelling, friendly visual cues and patient repetitions, Shama also instilled confidence in her students about returning to school during the pandemic. “Each day Ms. Jomaa brings playfulness and levity to her class, and the protection a safe, consistent teacher provides in times of stress,” says parent Miriam Nathwani. “Ms. Jomaa embodies innovative, inspiring and creative teaching every day.”

Karissa Shulko, Rio Terrace

Karissa has a way of inspiring and connecting with our youngest learners. With many parents apprehensive about sending their children to Kindergarten online, Karissa made the experience exciting and engaging last year.

“Our son was as excited to get on the computer as he was going to school,” says parent Andrea Adams. “She goes above and beyond to ensure everyone feels welcome, accepted and heard.” Parents also said Karissa was quick to share educational resources with them and maintain constant communication to make sure every student was getting what they needed from her class.

A number of parents noted Karissa’s kindness, patience and upbeat personality as infectious for their kids, whether learning online or in person. “She is truly a believer in education as a changing factor in childrens’ lives and has put her mind and heart into our children’s education over the years,” says parent Maria Castro Codesal, who has had two children in Karissa’s Kindergarten class.

By being approachable and proactive, she built strong relationships with families of her students, despite parents not being able to enter schools. “Karissa made it easy to talk with her about anything related to our concerns,” says parent Meredith Hunchak. “She didn’t just respond to our enquiries or concerns, she took action and provided feedback and updates.”

Her dedication to a safe and creative learning environment ensures all children can participate and start their school journey in a positive way.

Kelly Kurtz, Youngstown

For many parents, choosing to enrol their child in online learning last year during the COVID-19 pandemic was a tough decision. Many felt anxious and worried about their child’s learning. Many wondered if their child would receive the same quality education, if their young child would be engaged and how their child might build relationships in an online environment.

Kelly Kurtz put all those concerns at ease in an instant last year. Parents credited Kelly for her ability to provide a calm online learning environment for students in her Grade 2 online class. She was able to help students build relationships with their peers and found endlessly creative ways to keep students engaged online all year.

Parent Jennifer Gartner-Barker says, “I’m so grateful my daughter ended up in Mrs. Kurtz’s class. She is my daughter’s favourite teacher to date, and that’s saying a lot since they were not in a regular classroom together and had to meet through a screen. My daughter still talks about her to this day.”

Kelly ensured every child was successful. “My child continued to grow academically and socially all year through positive interactions with Mrs. Kurtz and her classmates,” says parent Tania Turkoglu. “Mrs. Kurtz’s commitment to continuing classroom connection was evident. Mrs. Kurtz also put a lot of hard work into preparing student packages that the kids worked from. Everything was perfectly organized and easy for the kids to find.”

Recognition of Merit *continued*

PARENT/COMMUNITY

Janelle Jaster, Balwin

Janelle has been a Success Coach at Balwin School for the last seven years and is described as an anchor of the Balwin community—students flock to Janelle for support and mentoring. Janelle works with students to navigate the challenging moments in their lives. Her compassionate demeanor and unbiased listening creates a safe space for students and allows her to build strong relationships.

Janelle is a trained circle keeper—she uses her knowledge to run conflict resolution groups and teach students peaceful, effective ways to handle and solve problems.

“Janelle not only listens to the struggles of our students, she helps shoulder the burden—students know they are not alone when Janelle is around,” says Teachers Sarah Ferrante and Chelsea Robbins.

Throughout the pandemic, Janelle demonstrated her kindness, care and selflessness through providing wrap-around support to the Balwin community. She helped identify and deliver food baskets to families in need. She helped deliver Chromebooks and connect families with internet service providers so they could engage with online learning. She connected families to organizations that provided optometry support so students could see the board in class. Her support has had an incredible impact on families and students and their individual readiness to learn.

“Janelle’s presence is a gift to the staff and students at Balwin School, where she is held in the highest regard. She is unanimously supported and one of the kindest souls I have ever met,” says Principal Christina Jones.

Thank You.

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