

Edmonton Public Schools'
DIVISION RECOGNITION
2022–23

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



Program

Kick-Off Video

Greetings, introductions and sponsor acknowledgement

Board Chair Julie Kusiek

Opening Remarks

Board Chair Julie Kusiek

Presentations for Division Recognition of Service

Presentations for Division Recognition of Teams

Presentations for Division Recognition of Merit

Closing Remarks

Board Chair Julie Kusiek

Reception

Atrium, Centre for Education




Message from the Board of Trustees

It is with great pleasure and heartfelt congratulations that we extend our gratitude for your exceptional contributions to Edmonton Public Schools. For over two decades, this program has celebrated the outstanding efforts of students, parents, community members and staff—and you are among this year's remarkable nominees!

Your dedication to the true spirit of public education is deeply appreciated. The passion, talent and unwavering commitment you bring to the Division has a profound and lasting impact on the lives of students, families and colleagues. Your stories—both those in the spotlight and the quiet, behind-the-scenes narratives—showcase the incredible collective strength of Edmonton Public Schools. You are an integral part of what makes the Division strong and vibrant.

Your energy and enthusiasm in classrooms, and your support and guidance in offices and school communities, all contribute to inspiring excellence and nurturing the potential of those around you. On behalf of the Board of Trustees, we sincerely thank you for your service and continued support. Congratulations once again, and may your stories continue to motivate, inspire and energize others in their everyday work, volunteering and life.



Julie Kusiek
Board Chair

Message from Event Co-Sponsor **Scotiabank**®

At Scotiabank, investing in our communities has been a focus for over 185 years. We believe investing in young people is the path to community prosperity.

We aim to support organizations that are committed to helping young people reach their infinite potential. We believe this is an investment in the long-term security, stability and growth of both our communities and our business.

In that spirit, we have been very proud to sponsor the Edmonton Public Schools' Division Recognition Program for the past 20 plus years.

The initiatives undertaken by the Division's staff, students, parents and other community members have a positive impact on our children and our community.

We acknowledge all of the nominees for their contributions and achievements. Individually, you are both inspiring and accomplished. Collectively, you are ensuring our future leaders have the necessary skills and resources they need to support their success.

Brian O'Neill
Director, National Accounts, Edmonton
Scotiabank Commercial Banking

Terry Sparling
Senior Manager, Payments
and Cash Management
Scotiabank Commercial Banking

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

Linda Renner, Aldergrove School

Linda is a dedicated Administrative Assistant at Aldergrove School who is, in the words of Teacher Jordan Jeremy, “the go-to person for, well, everything!” With 20 years of experience, Linda’s knowledge of the Division is highly valued by her colleagues.

She is known throughout the school community for much more than her professional knowledge. As the first person most visitors encounter when they enter the school, Linda makes everyone feel welcome. She treats students and fellow staff with “the same kindness and care that she shows for her own beautiful family,” according to Jordan. And, in the words of Teacher Susen Fischer, “Linda’s dedication to our staff, students, and to her work, makes everyone feel supported.”

Linda gives 100 per cent of her energy and dedication every day, which has led to Aldergrove School feeling like a second home for those who work and learn in the building. Teacher Cindy Potter sums it up, saying Linda “is an important piece of why Aldergrove is an AMAZING place to work.”

Patti Didine, Communications

Every team has a go-to person—the one who seems to know everything and everyone in the organization. For the Communications department, that person is Patti Didine. An essential part of the team, Patti works incredibly hard to provide timely and accurate information to schools and central units.

As the department’s Office Administrator, Patti keeps track of the budget, invoices, payroll details, Division processes, procurement procedures, OHS requirements and important deadlines—and she makes it look effortless. Her colleagues say she’s as cool as a cucumber and always calm under pressure, even making jokes to lighten the mood during stressful situations.

Communications Consultant Anna Batchelor notes that Patti is “dedicated to her role and the collective success of our department, always keeping consultants and our leadership team on track.” When information is needed, Patti either knows the answer or can find it quickly.

In between all of that work, Patti also finds time to use her organizational skills to help plan potlucks and other team-building activities. The Communications team bonds over food and Patti is often the one taking charge and making it happen.

Her wealth of knowledge, ability to solve problems and commitment to the team provides her colleagues with incredible peace of mind. In the words of Carrie Rosa, Managing Director of Communications, “I truly don’t know what we’d do without Patti.”

Geraldine (Ger) Vander Meulen, Dickinsfield School

Geraldine—or Ger, as her colleagues call her—has only been at École Dickinsfield School for a short time, but already her coworkers wonder how they ever supported students without her. As School Counsellor, Ger consistently goes above and beyond the call of duty to support students. Through a combination of one-on-one counselling sessions, group circles, workshops, family support, and offering guidance on high school, post-secondary and career choices, Ger’s passion for helping students succeed is apparent.

Teacher Erin Echeverria says, “Ger is kind and caring without being a pushover and the students respond to her extremely well. We have a few students who did not want to go to class last year due to anxiety, but thanks to Ger’s work they are coming to class regularly and are much more open to attempting tasks and activities.”

Ger also offers a counsellor’s ear to her colleagues, providing insight and advice if they’re feeling overwhelmed at work or in their personal lives.

In addition to her counselling duties, Ger has “initiated and actively participated in numerous initiatives aimed at promoting mental health awareness, character development, academic excellence, restorative justice practices and the development of resiliency in students,” according to Principal Chelsea Erdmann.

Ger lifts the spirits and boosts the resilience of everyone at École Dickinsfield School through her dedication to her work and by her regular reminders to students and staff alike that they are capable, they are loved and they are valuable.

Isidro Canessa, Donnan School

Isidro was the Head Custodian at Donnan School for 25 years before retiring this past school year. He was so beloved that when former students or parents stopped to visit the school, they would usually go out of their way to take a few minutes to talk to him. This, as Teacher Terence Scott points out, “speaks volumes of how he has treated people over the number of years that he has been in service.”

Even though he has retired, Isidro’s legacy lives on at Donnan School. Two new awards have been created in his honour: the Mr. Canessa Golden Garbage Can award, presented at monthly assemblies to recognize the cleanest classroom, and the Golden Boot award for the cleanest boot rack.

Through his decades of service to Donnan School, Isidro did far more than keep the building clean. He never hesitated to make sure things were ready for students and staff, whether this meant showing up extra early to clear snow in the winter or staying late when there were after-hours events in the school.

What he will be most remembered for, though, is how he treated everyone with kindness and respect. He greeted every student, staff member and visitor with a warm smile and kind words over the years. “Many times, I saw him stop to help a student tie a shoe, pick up dropped books, or simply lend a listening ear to anyone in need. It’s clear that to Isidro, Donnan was not just a workplace, but a community he deeply cared for,” recalls Principal Cathy Burrows.

In the words of Danielle Lebreton from Cornerstone Child Development Centre (a tenant at Donnan School), Isidro “exemplified every virtue that we value within our school and inspired us all to always do our best and to see the best in each other.”

Recognition of Service *continued*

Amine Issa, Eastglen School

Amine is the Library Technician at Eastglen School, recognized among students and staff for her commitment to literacy, student wellness and intercultural awareness. She has transformed the school library into a calm and welcoming environment where students are encouraged to spend time whether they are doing research for a school project, taking a wellness break or just hanging out during spare periods.

Amine's dedication to literacy is evident in the many contributions she makes to the school community. She can be found at every school event, taking a leading role in activities aimed at boosting literacy. She organizes book fairs and book exchanges and, during the summer, dedicates her time to creating the Eastglen Page-Turners—a book club tailored to the school's diverse population, selecting books that cater to their varied interests and helping nurture lifelong readers.

In addition to her amazing literacy-focused work, Amine cultivates a sense of community and inclusion at Eastglen. This work takes many forms. It may mean fostering a sense of belonging for Muslim students by helping support the first Eastglen Iftar celebration or showcasing the diversity of the student population by being a driving force behind Taste of Eastglen—the school's own mini Heritage Festival. It can also mean taking the time to listen to a student seeking her guidance. Assistant Principal Alina Engstrom says Amine's "active listening skills make every student feel like the most important person in the room."

Whether she is promoting literacy, inclusion or cross-cultural appreciation, Amine is truly a pillar of the Eastglen School community. In the words of Principal Denise McNeill, "Mrs. Issa's commitment to her role, her students, the families and the staff is genuinely inspirational and the contributions she makes to our school community are immeasurable."

Darrel Tripp, Garth Worthington School

Darrel is a standout Teacher at Garth Worthington School. He's known by students and staff for his commitment to individual student success, and regularly engages in meaningful conversations and works tirelessly to help students excel. Darrel maintains a positive attitude each day, even when navigating complexities of the classroom and a new school. Teacher Christopher Evans-Rymes says, "On every occasion that I have to pass his classroom, to observe him working with students, or to work directly with him on staff projects, I walk away with a profound respect for the love he has for the students."

Darrel is a fierce advocate for public education. He has shared his expertise with the province by working on the development of Student Learning Assessments and dedicates time outside the classroom to give voice to the needs of all students. "His contribution to the teaching profession cannot be overstated. He has invested countless hours ensuring that all students have positive experiences in school, both in and out of the classroom. He has had a positive impact on thousands of students," says Principal Christine Dibben.

Darrel's impact extends beyond the classroom and he goes the extra mile to build positive relationships with the school community. Whether it is by volunteering for events, coaching school sports teams or supporting his fellow educators, Darrel is always willing to lend a helping hand.

Fellow Teacher Jagrit Jhinjar says "Darrel is an educator that will continuously make a difference in the lives of his students by challenging them daily to be the best person they can be. He is an inspiring individual and represents the teacher that I someday hope to become."

Benito Velasco, Grandview Heights School

Benito is an indispensable asset to the school and community as Head Custodian at Grandview Heights School. He goes above and beyond to ensure that school facilities are maintained to the highest standards of cleanliness and safety. His meticulous attention to detail is one of the many qualities Benito brings to his work.

Benito is always available to help, and staff and students appreciate his personable nature in the school hallways every day. Teacher Jo-Layne Levesque notes that “Benito never stops. Every moment of his time is spent ensuring the school is a clean and welcoming environment for our community to ensure safety and physical and mental health.”

Whether he is lending a hand for school events or clearing snow off of staff vehicles in the winter, Benito’s willingness to go the extra mile doesn’t go unnoticed. Colleagues commend Benito not only for his dedication to custodial work, but for how he engages with students and staff. “Mr. Velasco has also taken the time to get to know staff and students at the school and he is beloved by all. It is noticeable on the rare days he is away from school,” says Teacher Jason Uretsky.

What truly sets Benito apart is his thoughtfulness and dedication to positivity with students, teachers and families alike. Assistant Principal Michelle Murphy says, “He consistently demonstrates a commitment to excellence in his custodial role, making a significant impact on the overall well-being of our educational community.”

Carmela Bruni-Bossio, J. Percy Page School

Carmela is an exceptional educator who has made a lasting mark on students and the school community—specifically, her work with English language learners and the English as a Second Language (ESL) program at J. Percy Page School.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, Carmela took it upon herself to make sure English language learners at the school received enough academic support and identified the crucial need to increase language-appropriate instruction. She set a goal to strengthen relationships with catchment junior high schools and share information with potential students about the type of support offered at J. Percy Page. This dedication to go the extra mile by Carmela helped double the size of the ESL program and add additional teaching staff for English language learners.

In addition to Carmela’s advocacy for the ESL program, her unique style of teaching has a positive impact on English language learners. “The atmosphere in Ms. Bruni-Bossio’s classroom is unparalleled at J. Percy Page. Walking into her space you are immediately greeted by smiling students; their sense of pride in the learning community and respect for each other is palpable,” says Assistant Principal Cam Tully.

Carmela is always determined to ensure the students she teaches have equal opportunities to participate in school events, which shows her deep passion for each student’s educational experience. “I have had the opportunity to observe and acknowledge the exceptional dedication and effectiveness she demonstrates in her role as an educator, particularly in her support of students,” says Jel Pacheco, High School Site Liaison from Action for Healthy Communities.

Carmela is not only available to students during their learning but she is an inspiration and support for them as they navigate their career paths. Student Asila Nazari says, “Ms. Bruni has shown me that I can stand up and do everything that I want to in life.”

Recognition of Service *continued*

Lauren Green, Jasper Place School

Lauren has transformed the athletics program during her time as Athletics Director at Jasper Place School. She fosters a deep sense of belonging and pride among students and strives to give every student an opportunity to excel in athletics.

Even during challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic, Lauren ensured students still had the team experience by holding virtual meetings and personally making connections with each player. Students Gracelin and Isabella Spenrath are thankful for Lauren's support in their own athletic endeavours, and say, "She has helped to make athletics a positive and encouraging thing at Jasper Place, and leaves a proud legacy on those in the athletics community."

Being Athletics Director of such a large school is no easy task, but Lauren takes it in stride. She dedicates much of her own time to offer team practice on holidays and weekends, organizes team trips and tournaments and works with the community to get sponsorships.

Assistant Principal Susan Meunier echoes student praise for Lauren, saying, "She is constantly looking for ways to improve our athletics program and to provide more opportunities for all Jasper Place students to be involved in athletics. Her passion and dedication is greatly valued by the staff, students and parents of Jasper Place."

"I've been privileged to witness a person who is committed and invested in developing young athletes, and in creating an environment where everyone can contribute to the success of athletics and foster a positive school culture," says parent Ruth Olson. Lauren's tireless efforts and passion for an inclusive school culture through athletics goes far beyond the ordinary.

Janice Parsons, Jasper Place School

Janice's outstanding contributions as a Computer Science Teacher at Jasper Place School have made her a guiding force, helping to shape students' future careers.

Former student Awais Mehter says, "She allowed me to be myself in her classroom and explore my passions through my preferred learning method: hands-on learning. She allowed and encouraged me to work at my own pace, encouraging my interests and helping me be less stressed in school."

Her effectiveness as an educator shows in the diverse skills and interests she cultivates in her classroom. Under her guidance, students develop a keen passion for 3D printing, using hardware, robotics and computer science. The freedom and access to experimentation she provides aligns with various learning styles and supports academic growth. She extends herself beyond the classroom and offers students the opportunity to participate in events like the VEX Robotics Competition, Skills Canada and ASTech Awards.

Former student Alexander Anderson praises Janice's unique approach to teaching, saying, "She creates a fun and engaging learning environment that fosters STEM related innovation and inspires you to push the boundaries of what you know and can do. She cares about her students' success and is always supportive of both class-related and extracurricular projects, encouraging collaboration and imaginative solutions."

Janice served as President of the Computer Science Teachers Association of Alberta, has spoken at multiple educational conferences and contributed to the Career and Technology Council. Her efforts towards lifelong learning and curiosity are what make her an exceptional educator.

Jasper Place Teacher Jamie Imeson says, "In addition to her exceptional teaching, she generously devotes an incredible amount of her time to extracurricular clubs, providing students with invaluable opportunities to explore their passions and interests."

Gerald MacDonald, L.Y. Cairns School

From the moment Gerald started as Teacher at L.Y. Cairns School, his positive impact was unmistakable and continued to flourish each day.

Gerald was a beacon of dedication and skill in the field of horticulture, devoting over 20 years to teaching at L.Y. Cairns. His final year in the 2022–23 school year marked the culmination of an extraordinary career. His ability to forge positive relationships underscored his commitment to the success of both students and staff.

Principal Errol Johson says, “He understood the importance of creating positive relationships and demonstrated genuine caring and respect to each person with whom he worked with.” What set Gerald apart was his unwavering support for students with complex needs, fostering an environment where every child is encouraged to do their absolute best. “Gerald is kind hearted and truly cared about students, their families, his colleagues and the community,” says L.Y. Cairns Teacher Victoria Stusiak.

His establishment of the horticulture program is nothing short of spectacular. Through initiatives like the school’s annual plant sale, Gerald not only raised funds for the school, but also demonstrated the diverse career opportunities students can explore in horticulture.

One remarkable aspect of Gerald’s contributions is his commitment to Indigenous perspectives. Throughout his career, he endeavoured to learn about First Nation, Métis, and Inuit foundational knowledge. Gerald wove this knowledge into his teaching, sharing the richness of Indigenous perspectives with his students. “He was eager to learn about the Indigenous perspective when it comes to plants and medicines and then shared that knowledge respectfully with his students. He had a true gift for captivating his students and sharing his vast knowledge and love for the plant world,” says Elder Phillip Camiou.

Even in retirement, his legacy thrives as he continues to guide and share knowledge with his successor, ensuring the longevity of traditions he established.

Joan Nicholson, Lauderdale School

Joan is an experienced and caring Educational Assistant (EA) at Lauderdale School who constantly goes above and beyond for students and families. Described as a pillar of Lauderdale with a dedication that’s unparalleled, Joan has been an integral part of the school for over two decades.

As EA, Joan supports students in the Opportunity Program. She is dedicated to giving students the best learning opportunities possible—students feel a sense of belonging and know they are safe with Joan by their side. Joan is also the go-to person when a new EA joins the school—she shares her knowledge with new staff members and helps ensure a smooth transition for everyone.

Joan is also Lauderdale’s unofficial librarian, taking care of the school’s large library. She works tirelessly to make sure that every reading level is considered and all students have access to books they can enjoy and learn from. Most recently, Joan devoted many hours to ensuring that the Lauderdale library was more inclusive with books representing different cultures and celebrating the unique differences within the student body.

“It has been wonderful to hear the students say things like, ‘I found a book with a mosque!’ or ‘The girl in this book looks like me!’ This is a result of Joan’s efforts,” says Principal Allison Barber.

On top of all this, Joan also organizes busing, parties and events including the school’s book sale. Educational Assistant Ruqiyah Omar says, “Joan’s impact on our school community is immeasurable. Her positive attitude and willingness to go the extra mile make her an inspiration to all of us.”

Recognition of Service *continued*

Whitney Hollett, M.E. LaZerte School

Whitney teaches and runs the Individual Support Program (ISP) at M.E. LaZerte School, which provides programming for students with complex physical, medical and learning needs.

A shining example of dedication, adaptability and compassion, Whitney's exceptional care for students is evident in how she has created a nurturing and inclusive learning environment. Each student feels valued, supported and empowered to overcome the challenges associated with their health conditions. She encourages students to expand their personal horizons.

"I can personally attest to the passion, leadership and genuine love for others that Whitney has. The children and staff are equally happy to be engaged in such a special environment," says Educational Assistant Angela Boyko.

Whitney has a deep understanding of the medical conditions that affect her students, which allows her to seamlessly collaborate with healthcare professionals and integrate medical considerations into her teaching practices. She works with other Specialized Learning Supports professionals and consultants regularly and has become a specialist in teaching students with complex needs.

"With Whitney's constant gentle encouragement, the students are challenged to grow in meaningful ways. She has differentiated her instruction to match the learning styles of each student," says Physical Therapist Heidi Van Ry. She navigates students' needs with grace and flexibility while adjusting lesson plans and classroom routines to accommodate individualized health requirements. This adaptability ensures that each student receives a personalized education.

Whitney also acts as a team leader for the four educational assistants who work in her classroom. She leads by example and treats everyone with dignity and respect.

Inclusive Learning Department Head Erin Segin says, "Her steadfast commitment to the students and their families is evident in her daily interactions, and she goes above and beyond to create a supportive community within the classroom."

James Kosowan, Old Scona School

James teaches theory of knowledge, debate and social studies, and is the Department Head of Student Activities and Leadership at Old Scona School. He is described as humble, warm-hearted and patient.

A gifted educator, he encourages students to reach their full potential academically and personally, always seeking to understand each student's unique needs.

“As a great teacher who always supports his students to succeed and explore their full potential, Mr. Kosowan always goes above and beyond,” says parent Hang Cai.

James heads up the debate program at Old Scona, devoting hours to mentoring students. James has organized tournaments and summer camps for students hoping to work on their confidence and public speaking skills. Under his leadership, the Old Scona Speech and Debate team won the 2023 Canadian Ethics Olympiad (a national competition), finished first place at the 2023 Churchill Debate Tournament and won the gold medal at the 2023 Edmonton Debate Regionals.

“Mr. Kosowan has been an invaluable asset to our school,” say parents Adrian and Michelle Tost. “Mr. Kosowan embodies the qualities and characteristics of an outstanding teacher.”

From being the teacher advisor for the Chess Club to organizing international school trips and everything he does to support the debate program, James' passion for students and helping them succeed is evident in everything he contributes to Old Scona School. James was critical in helping the Chess Club organize several tournaments where they collaborated with multiple Edmonton high schools to build a strong inter-school community and reduce barriers for all students interested in the game.

Recent Old Scona graduate Deven Reddy says, “Mr. Kosowan is not like family, but he is family—the purest embodiment of the Old Scona Academic (OSA) culture which he has been crucial in fostering.”

Recognition of Service *continued*

Betty Clark, Queen Elizabeth School

Betty has devoted 15 years of service to Queen Elizabeth School as Administrative Assistant. In the words of Assistant Principal Modey Amerey, “Betty’s qualities of dependability, unwavering positivity, consistency and promptness set the standard for excellence in her interactions with colleagues, students and parents.”

Before Betty’s recent retirement, her contributions to Queen Elizabeth extended far beyond the responsibilities of her role. As Principal Brent McKeown states, “Such is her impact that it is hard to actually imagine a time before Betty and it is impossible to overstate her importance to our school as we envision a future without her.”

Teacher Abbass Hojeij puts it, “She unofficially, and perhaps unknowingly, became a steady hand that held daily operations together.” Throughout her time at Queen Elizabeth School, Betty was consistently committed to making sure the school’s administrative function was the best it could be. She worked on various administrative initiatives and projects that greatly impacted the efficiency and effectiveness of the school’s processes. Betty’s unwavering commitment to the entire school community was evident not only in her exceptional work and ethic, but in how she dedicated time to volunteering and helping with extracurricular activities.

During the last couple of years, which proved to be some of the most complex years in education, Betty was a consistently calming force for staff, students and families. She was trusted and relied upon for her independent and sound decision-making.

Brent says, “She is one of the finest professionals I have worked with in my career and while we will unquestionably miss her wisdom and good guidance, she has left a legacy with all of those she has worked with that will be evident in our school for the foreseeable future.”

Tom Porter, Rutherford School

Tom is the Head Custodian at Rutherford School. He’s described as incredibly friendly and cheerful, always greeting students and staff with a smile. His outstanding quality of work and work ethic is evident in the high praise he receives from his colleagues.

When Tom started working at Rutherford in the 2022–23 school year, he came to the school with enthusiasm and an immense amount of energy, working tirelessly in collaboration with staff to keep the school clean. Tom has really made Rutherford School shine.

He is unwavering in his dependability and responsiveness—when a situation arises that needs urgent attention, Tom is on the scene immediately. As Teacher Marnie Young puts it, “Tom is quick to help out at any time, whether it is to set up for an event, building maintenance or cleaning.”

Over the summer months, in preparation for a new school year, Tom not only cleaned the school top to bottom, but also set up classrooms, arranged furniture and made sure everything was spotlessly clean. “No detail had been overlooked—the furniture set up with care, and the classrooms and school in its entirety was ready to welcome new smiling faces,” says Teacher Amy MacEachern.

His flexibility, reliability and professionalism means Tom is always there to help. It’s safe to say that his contribution to the Rutherford School community has made the school a welcoming place for all.

“I have never witnessed a custodian take as much pride in their work as Tom does. He is always on the go, checking in to make sure that everything is in its place and that all things are cleaned to his very high standard,” says Teacher Jolene Helgason. “We are truly lucky to have him on our team.”

Vu Tran, Supply Custodial Services (for service to Lauderdale School)

Described as the ultimate professional, Supply Custodian Vu worked at Lauderdale School for a short time, but fit in right from day one. He left a lasting impression on the staff, students and whole community at Lauderdale.

“He is one of the most remarkable custodians I have encountered,” says Principal Allison Barber. “He is pleasant to everyone, including staff and students, and people feel welcomed by him. His infectious smile has the power of getting those around him to smile.”

Vu could always be relied on to replenish supplies, carry furniture, and ensure garbage was emptied, classroom floors were mopped and much more. He had Lauderdale School shining and sparkling. He arranged all the materials needed for a summer clean up and for stripping floors, and set up an entire summer schedule for the school.

Vu’s professionalism and care extended far beyond his custodial duties. He made sure all students, staff and families felt cared for—greeting everyone with a warm smile and welcome to the school. “His gentle spirit, work ethic and positive attitude will be some of the many things we will miss,” says Teacher Esther Dada.

Teacher Rand Jurf says, “Vu’s positive attitude and work ethic emulate the values the Division strives to foster in all of our students. It is an absolute honour to know and have worked with him.”

Juan Gomez, Svend Hansen School

As Head Custodian at Svend Hansen School, Juan’s commitment to maintaining a clean, safe and comfortable learning environment has greatly contributed to the overall success of the school.

“He continually exceeds the custodial standards for our school and he contributes positively to the lives of all students and staff that he works with,” says Assistant Principal Darrell Paquette.

In addition to his exceptional custodial skills, Juan consistently demonstrates professionalism, reliability and a strong work ethic. His hard work ensures that every nook and cranny of the school is not just clean, but a welcoming space for all. “His attention to detail and meticulous approach ensure that our learning and common spaces are maintained to standards that many of us have never experienced before,” says Assistant Principal Amanda Freeman.

What truly sets Juan apart is his ability to lead a team with infectious enthusiasm. Under his guidance, the custodial team is a well-coordinated unit, working seamlessly to maintain the highest standards of cleanliness throughout the school.

“His positive and friendly demeanour has been instrumental in fostering a collaborative and harmonious environment within our school community. Mr. Gomez’s approachable nature and willingness to assist others have earned him the respect and admiration of his colleagues,” says Principal Christina Jones.

Recognition of Service *continued*

Cliff Whelan-Keats, Technology and Information Management (for service to Johnny Bright School)

The staff at Johnny Bright School consider Technical Analyst Cliff an indispensable member of their team. He's known for his belief that technology is not merely a tool, but a way to enhance students' educational experience.

One of the many ways he serves the school is by supporting technology used by students with exceptionalities. In the words of Assistant Principal Andy Connelly, "Cliff is consistently a positive force in the school as he uses his cheerfulness, willingness to help and his unrelenting belief in student achievement to support teaching and learning with technology."

Cliff's impact goes beyond fixing technical issues; he goes the extra mile to ensure a smooth transition for new staff members and to help them integrate seamlessly into the day-to-day operations of the school. Principal Kathleen Marzolf says, "His patient demeanor has been particularly valuable in alleviating the stress that can often accompany technology issues, making interactions with him not only productive but also pleasant."

Cliff has inspired confidence in school staff as they use technology in their daily jobs. Not only does he fix technical problems, he provides support to staff who feel overwhelmed by technology-related challenges. Teacher Kayla Nabe says, "His patience knows no bounds as he tirelessly assists teachers, regardless of the complexity of the issue or time it takes to resolve it. His approachable demeanor and willingness to listen attentively to concerns make every interaction with him a positive and reassuring experience."

To the Johnny Bright School community, Cliff is more than an IT expert—he is a pillar of support, a problem-solver and a source of inspiration for the school community.

Jason Ludwar, Westglen School

As Principal of Westglen School, it's Jason's priority to make everyone feel valued and welcome. His strong leadership has played a pivotal role in shaping the school's culture and has inspired students, staff and the community to work together toward common goals.

Jason's colleagues say he leads by example, always lending a hand wherever a hand is needed and striving to enhance student achievement. He's worked with school staff to review literacy and numeracy resources for each grade and has supported staff with resources and training so they can better support a high quality education for students.

Every day, Jason shows his commitment to positive school culture for students, staff and the larger school community. He makes school fun, and is the driving force behind whole-school events like an annual movie night, pyjama-read-at-night, Swiftogedden and a weekly running club. His dedication to making these events inclusive and memorable for all has enriched the school experience for many students and staff.

"He is a transformational leader who has elevated our school to new heights," says Teacher Allison Titley. "His unwavering commitment to play-based activities and building our school community has left an indelible mark on our school, making it a vibrant and nurturing place for students to thrive."

Teacher Amanda Dolhaniuk says, "Each day we come to Westglen, we are thankful to have a leader as committed as Jason. Someone who is kind, compassionate, organized and creative. Our school is a better place because of him."

Vicente Doce, Winterburn School

Winterburn School's Head Custodian Vicente Doce is known not just for being great at his job, but for his kindness, loyalty and welcoming smiles.

Custodian Ernesto Saldivar from Alex Janvier School says, "Vicente stands out as being Superman." This sentiment echoes through the hallways of Winterburn School, where Vicente goes above and beyond to support students and the whole school community. He's known as a leader, mentor and true asset to the school. "He takes a great deal of pride in ensuring the school is safe and looking gorgeous at all times," says Ernesto.

"Vicente is an amazing leader and mentor to whomever he is training or working with. He shares his expertise while maintaining high expectations," says Teacher Kennedy Kiss. "He puts his entire soul into the work he does for our school. Every member of our staff notices his tireless dedication."

Vicente goes out of his way to find solutions to problems and lend an extra hand where needed. He has organized the set up of the school's holiday concert and cultural celebrations. He also takes time to show students what he does and teach them the importance of cleanliness. Many students consider spending recess with Mr. Vicente a special privilege, which speaks to the special relationships he has built.

Principal Wolf Kolb acknowledges Vicente's commitment, saying, "He has proven to be truly committed to making Winterburn school a wonderful place to learn and work."

Recognition of Service *continued*

PARENT/COMMUNITY

Farida Al-Soufi, Balwin School

Farida is an e4c nutrition program worker at Balwin School, but she regularly goes above and beyond. To the students and staff she works with on a daily basis, Farida is a warm smile first thing in the morning and a safe person in a safe space they can go to whenever they need help. She not only takes care of meeting students' nutritional needs, she regularly offers to help with whatever else needs doing. Teacher Chanelle Cluett-Alstad says Farida is always the first person to ask if anyone needs help, "...when we all know that feeding approximately 500 students, several meals per day, leaves her with no extra time; but she asks anyway and we love her for that."

In addition to her regular duties, Farida enthusiastically and consistently supports large events outside of her official role, including Balwin's turkey lunch in December, and Meet the Staff and World Hijab Day events. On the school's culture day, she taught Grade 9 students how to make sambusas—a favourite dish among the school community.

In their nomination letters, staff consistently refer to the Balwin School community as a family. Farida is an important member of that family, in both her official role and the many ways she makes students feel welcome and loved. She coaches them on how to co-operate and look after one another, and leads by example in caring for everyone in the building like members of her family.

Principal Carolyn Mathew expresses what many in the Balwin community surely feel about Farida: "...my love and respect for her grows on a daily basis. I am honoured to work with this strong and talented woman and we are lucky to have her in our Balwin family."

Erin Ostapovich, Belvedere School

Erin is a dedicated parent volunteer and a valued member of the Belvedere School community. Throughout the years, she's taken on numerous roles at the school, always showing outstanding commitment, effort and leadership.

Erin is often the first face families see when they open the doors to the school each morning. Since the e4c nutrition program began five years ago, she arrives early to provide a variety of nutritious breakfast options to students. This role comes with some unique challenges, such as a limited budget—but Erin has used her resourcefulness and creativity with the menu not only to make the best of the budget, but to encourage students to try new, healthy foods.

"Erin genuinely loves the students, works hard and always maintains a warm, cheerful smile, which lifts their spirits as they begin their school day with a healthy breakfast," says Teacher Huelan Lu.

For four years, Erin served as president of the Belvedere school council, and always kept a focus on what's best for students. She organized and led numerous successful fundraising campaigns that helped the school purchase more technology and support field trips so students could experience hands-on learning. Because of these efforts, students were able to attend the symphony, create a drama production and participate in Fit, Set, Ninja.

As a lunch supervisor, Erin supports all students in the school. "Erin has a gentle nature that builds relationships and trust right away with all students and staff," says Assistant Principal Laura Scott. Erin has worked in most of the classrooms, and students really look forward to having her in their class.

"With celebrity status like Erin's, the kids feel comfortable coming to see her and trust her to solve any issues that they may encounter during lunch," says Teacher Carling Hatt.

Laura says, "Erin is truly an essential part of our Belvedere family."

Bernice Abraham, Donnan School

Bernice has devoted over 25 years of invaluable service to the Donnan School community. Over three decades, she has shown unparalleled commitment, patience and passion, and has continuously gone above and beyond to help children.

“Bernice is a very hard worker who never expects anything in return. Her warm, caring, trustworthy and dependable personality always shines through. She’s always willing to help where there’s need in the school,” says Educational Assistant Barbara Parcels. She supports in many ways, including putting up displays for special functions, acting as school photographer, organizing house teams, attending school council meetings, organizing popcorn sales and helping at book fairs, just to name a few.

“What makes Bernice truly special is the capacity to connect with our young learners. Using an innate ability to communicate with children, combined with a genuine love for learning and nurturing, she has managed to create countless moments that have had a profound impact on students,” says Principal Cathy Burrows.

Bernice has an especially special relationship with the Grade 1 students at Donnan School. She supports students by working with them one-on-one to help build their confidence. “She is unique in that she provides the kids with a firm but loving and safe environment to make mistakes and try again,” says Grade 1 Teacher Donna Machinski. She’s also known to keep snacks on hand for any student who may want something to eat.

The ripples of her kindness and dedication can be felt throughout the entire school. Families, parents, teachers and staff alike have voiced their appreciation for the warmth, guidance and unwavering support Bernice provides.

Laurie Sorensen, Hardisty School

Retired teacher Laurie Sorensen began volunteering at Hardisty School in the fall of 2022 to help Ukrainian refugee students with English language skills. The former teacher soon began helping other students in reading, writing and math, as well.

After a few months of being back in a school setting, Laurie noticed the school library could use some assistance since it was without a librarian. Teachers and administrators were doing their best to keep the library a warm, inviting and comfortable space, which Laurie elevated when she began to spend her early mornings shelving books and keeping things organized.

“People like Laurie don’t come along often,” says Teacher Keri-Ann Rattray. “She wasn’t sought out or asked to help us; she saw the need and reached out. And once she started, the giving didn’t stop. She continued to step up and help wherever she could, finding more of her time to give whenever possible.”

Laurie’s impact goes beyond language teaching, as her positive influence and meaningful relationships with students makes them feel welcome and capable.

“Laurie’s positive attitude and encouragement is such a gift for these students and all students at Hardisty,” says Teacher Debbie Dunkin.

By willing to volunteer in many roles at Hardisty, Laurie has become part of what Teacher Erin Wilson calls “our Hardisty family.” “Her dedication sets an inspiring example for others to follow,” she adds.

Jennifer MacDonald, Soraya Hafez School

Jennifer MacDonald has played an integral role in the success of Soraya Hafez School becoming a strong symbol of community and service since it opened in 2020.

Despite the complexities of supporting new students, families and staff during a pandemic, Jennifer rose to the challenge enthusiastically and passionately, playing a key role in establishing the Soraya Hafez School Council, the Soraya Hafez Fundraising Association and the Soraya Hafez Community Playground Fundraising Committee.

“Jennifer found herself on all three committees in positions such as Chair, Vice-Chair, Acting Chair and, most importantly, as an active volunteer in every opportunity to support our school and create memorable experiences for students, staff and families,” says former Principal Heather Langenhahn.

Jennifer’s unwavering commitment, remarkable dedication and exceptional leadership not only serve her community, but also leave a mark on fellow committee members, other volunteers and the entire school community.

Her meticulous planning, attention to detail and proactive approach are also commended, as are her well-researched and creative ideas, especially as the work of these committees continues to result in strong support.

“Despite a full time job and a growing family, Jennifer has devoted countless hours in her commitment to our school and the community it serves,” adds Heather.

“Jennifer’s belief in public education, relationships and children has been pivotal in the success of our school and 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

Alex Janvier Lunch Supervisors

The members of this team are Team Lead Kelly King, Felicia Barton, Bev Christie, Katie-Anna Darrah, Henrietta Fisher, Jeannie Mah, Ginny Tsui and Elizabeth Woodruff. These supervisors all previously worked at Afton School for over 10 years, and approached Alex Janvier School prior to its opening to express their interest in continuing their commitment by serving the new school. The core team has remained with the school since its opening.

This team is committed, positive and reliable. Assistant Principal Shelley Kofluk says, "This team has worked alongside the teachers and school administration to ensure our students get the care and attention they need during lunch." The team primarily supervises Division 2 students, and they strike a perfect balance between firm and fair. "They always treat students with the utmost respect and kindness, and ensure things remain orderly and safe," says Principal Robert Smilanich.

They have also gone above and beyond by seeking community donations, helping make sandwiches for the junior high lunch cart and organizing hot lunch fundraisers in support of a new playground. Jeannie Mah also took on the role of the Nutrition Support Worker with e4c and the breakfast program. Principal Smilanich says, "She is here at 7 a.m. every morning preparing breakfast for up to 40 students and then still returns at lunchtime!"

Former Afton School teacher and current parent in the Alex Janvier School community, Dianne Gilchrist-McCollum, says, "In addition to ensuring children are provided what they need for lunch, the supervisors often entertain students by engaging them in discussions and reading to them. They support students during transitions and supervise them outside during recess. They help establish a calm return to the learning environment in time for classes to begin again, and then help with cleanup and preparation for the next day."

Principal Smilanich says, "Through their contributions, they have made Alex Janvier School a better place to be and we are so very grateful to have them as part of our community."

Recognition of Teams *continued*

Diversity and Equity Panel, Balwin School

The members of this team are Teachers Chanelle Cluett-Alstad, Jasmine Derkach, Amrit Ghuman, Nimrat Johal and Eunice Owusu, and Education Assistant Sonya Harriott.

Assistant Principal Crystal Lawrence says, “The team worked tirelessly to organize and plan an anti-racism and diversity panel, to bring together community leaders with a wide range of knowledge and perspectives.”

“They not only created an amazing panel to answer student questions, they created space for individual speakers to share their journeys and experiences with students,” says Principal Carolyn Mathew. “Students saw themselves and at the same time, saw their peers reflected through people in interesting and essential roles in our community.”

“The discussions held during this panel have had an authentic, long-lasting impact on all of those who participated. It was an opportune event for Balwin students to see representation of themselves in successful role models from our community,” says Crystal.

Trustee Marsha Nelson recognizes the work the panel has done to support Priority 2 of the Division Strategic Plan: Advancing action towards anti-racism and reconciliation. “This panel’s presentation is an action that will result in positive change for staff and students. It is my hope that this open and frank conversation will result in meaningful, long-term systemic change,” says Trustee Nelson.

“This team was also dedicated in their efforts to collaborate and organize events to highlight anti-racism and acceptance throughout the year,” says Assistant Principal Lawrence. They organized everything from Black History Month to Diversity Day, which included presentations, and activities like drumming, a lion dance, origami, Indigenous performances and a Ukrainian singer.

Interactions Educational Assistants, Balwin School

Educational Assistants Alice Benoit, Rich De Vela, Christina Harpe, Katie McKenna, Erika Reynolds, Melanie Richards, Merie Smith, Rachael Switzer and Adele Woo are the members of this team.

These individuals dedicate themselves to Grades 1 to 9 students with autism spectrum disorder. “Their commitment to students living with autism to living lives of dignity and fulfilment is incredible,” says Principal Carolyn Mathew. “Student learning and engagement needs and goals drive their work on a daily basis. They work with their teacher team to make the Balwin Interactions program a place of learning, growing, communication and laughter.” They are creative, skillful, flexible, collaborative and responsive. Their tireless efforts help meet the academic, personal, mental and social wellbeing needs of all students in their care. They also strive to help other students better understand the uniqueness of students who have autism.

Interactions Teachers Amy Shaigec and Meghan Brohman say, “Their commitment encompasses diverse roles, including one-on-one guidance, classroom management and support for Interactions students. They adapt to each student’s unique requirements, cultivating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere.” Assistant Principal Crystal Lawrence says, “The team uses approaches that are trauma-informed and maintain student dignity. Students are provided with exemplary emergent literacy and numeracy programming from our team, while attending to individual student medical and sensory needs.”

They also organized and helped out with larger school events like family movie night and Interactions Day, which celebrated current students and welcomed new students transitioning to Balwin. This team made Interactions Day a success through their fundraising, organization, and attention to detail to maintain student safety and engagement. “We are incredibly proud of this team,” says Crystal Lawrence.

DDM's Yearbook Team, Dr. Donald Massey School

The members of this team are Educational Assistants Wafa Abdel-Rahman, Wendy Doucette, Roselyn Drani, Priscilla Ejike, Brittney Gawlik, Carrie Hilderley, Breanne Marchak, Tarena Martin and Darlene Ramdeen.

These individuals took the initiative to create a yearbook for over 900 students—only the second time since the first one 13 years ago. “Bringing this yearbook to life was an important milestone following the pandemic,” says Principal Cheryl Belyea. “Its pages showcased and celebrated the theme Connected Together. Creating such a product was a first for everyone on this team, but they believed in their vision and brought their ideas to life.”

Throughout the school year, as they were able, the team met to design page layouts, select and take photos, and connect with classrooms about content. They collaborated and learned to tap into each other's strengths. They took a risk, remained focused on the goal, worked through any challenges or frustrations and created a keepsake that everyone could be proud of.

Parent Lisa Decker says, “Having this yearbook as a keepsake allows us and our children to relive the joy, friendships and growth they have experienced throughout the year. It's a reminder of the incredible community we are a part of, and it strengthens the bonds we share with our school and with each other. They captured moments that, as a parent, we are not able to experience firsthand.”

Cheryl explained their efforts supported school work around increasing students' social, emotional and physical well-being (School Goal #2), as well as supported student and staff well-being and mental health (Division Priority #3).

“The impact of the teams' work cannot simply be measured in the successes this year, but what it will mean to students and families for years to come,” says Assistant Principal Isaac MacDonald.

Lunch Supervisors Team, Dr. Lila Fahlman School

The members of this team are Asma Bsharat, Pauline Cheung, Adrienne Daye-Morris, Nazleen Khwaja, Lucy Kim, Misun Kim, Anne Nemenzo, Rashmi Patel, Milasree Saha and Jackie Tsang.

Lunch Supervision Team Lead Yena Chung says, “They are the most positive, encouraging and diverse group of women. They not only help students have a good lunch, but also make sure that the students are happy to continue their good mood for their classes after lunch.”

“We are so fortunate to have a caring, respectful, responsible group of supervisors,” says Administrative Assistant Nancy Osborn.

With their walkie-talkies in hand, rain or shine, they supervise multiple classes of students, both inside and outside. This team has maintained an unwavering level of enthusiasm and dedication. Their performance was exemplary. These supervisors demonstrated consistent and effective communication skills, quickly addressing any issues that arose, while also demonstrating the ability to handle situations independently. “Their interactions with students, colleagues and teachers were characterised by a high level of professionalism and a strong sense of teamwork,” says Yena.

Principal Cory MacTaggart says, “They go the extra mile to create an environment where students are well-cared for during lunchtime. Their smiles, kind words and unwavering patience make lunchrooms a welcoming place for students. We appreciate their efforts.”

Recognition of Teams *continued*

Hungry Devils, Eastglen School

The members of this team are Department Head Seanne Stillar, Teachers Remington Faid, Khaleel Gova (now at Kate Chegwin), Alissa Senio and Ally Warawa, Safety Coach Lyndon Taylor, and Educational Assistant Liz Racko.

These team members are described as collaborative, compassionate and inspiring. They saw a need and took it upon themselves to combat food insecurity in the school community.

Each Monday morning, they provided students with a hearty breakfast, ensuring students start their week off with the nourishment they need to focus on their studies. Classrooms are regularly supplied with weekly bins of nutritious snacks and fruits. Department Head Greg Wong says, “As not all students were able to get access to the breakfast before school, this team included students in our Community Life Skills program to help prepare, organize, distribute and collect fruits and healthy choice snacks to classes.” During exam week, they also ensured students had a nourishing breakfast to kick-start their day of challenging diploma exams.

This team has reduced food insecurity stigma by fostering a sense of inclusivity and creating an environment where food is accessible to all students.

Science Department Head Leanne Lyons says, “When students have the opportunity to meet their nutritional needs, they are better able to focus throughout their school day and not on hunger; this may translate into greater academic success.”

“Their commitment to tackling food insecurity in our school is truly commendable and their work has significantly improved the well-being of our students,” says Principal Denise McNeill.

Elmwood Individual Supports Program (ISP) Team

The members of this team are Teachers Kanwaljeet Pannu and Stacy Stiles, and Educational Assistants Debbie Ainsley, Susan Ferrer, Heidi Geusebroek, Monique Neil, Chandra Smith and Jess Struik.

Parent Meghan Johannsson says, “I have witnessed the care, compassion, and pride they have for their students, as well as their commitment to providing a safe, inclusive and stimulating learning environment.” Meghan also explained that the team is dedicated to fostering inclusion throughout the school. They provide students with the opportunity to learn alongside other classrooms, by joining them for things like science experiments, music class or a math lesson. Meghan says, “This not only brightens the lives of the ISP students, but it also has a positive impact on the rest of the school community. As the mother of a child with different needs and abilities, it is heartwarming to see my daughter accepted and celebrated by her peers.”

Another parent, Bridey Roberts, says, “To have a child who suffers from anxiety and a lot of uncertainty with new circumstances and environments, the continuity of having a well-established team has been extremely beneficial to not only my daughter but to me, as a parent, as well. The team works wonderfully together and you can see the joy and passion each member of this team shares on a daily basis.”

Johnny Bright Administrative Assistants Team

Angie Frase, Laura Lopez and Patricia Peddle are the members of this team.

This dedicated and welcoming group of ladies is the heart of Johnny Bright's administrative operations.

"This is an exceptional group of individuals. Their efficiency, warm personalities and patience make them indispensable assets to our school," says Teacher Julie Wilson.

They manage various tasks including transportation, registration, finances and communication, all while supporting school staff and addressing unexpected requests with patience. They welcome staff, parents, students and visitors with open arms and friendly smiles, creating a positive and inviting atmosphere in the school office. They also prioritize the well-being of the students, ensuring they are looked after in various situations. "They are often faced with multiple things happening at once in their office space but with confidence and efficiency, they put students' needs first and then prioritize what needs to happen next," says Assistant Principal Jacqueline Baker.

This skilled team made the school start-up run so smoothly, ensuring they had everything organized for students, families and staff—whether it was welcoming a new family or staff member, helping with busing details or helping manage phone and email inquiries, they were on top of it all.

"They collaborate seamlessly, share responsibilities and provide each other with unwavering support," says Principal Kathleen Marzolf. "Their ability to work cohesively ensures that no task is too daunting and they consistently meet high standards of efficiency and professionalism."

Teacher Julie Wilson says, "They have made a significant and lasting impact on our school community."

Johnny Bright Custodial Team

The team is composed of Head Custodian Navtej Singh Pangli, and Custodians Elpidio Castillo, Elex Crelencia and Roger Dumas.

This team is dedicated to maintaining the cleanliness, safety and functionality of Johnny Bright School. They are a friendly, approachable, reliable and caring presence in the school community, and they make a difference every day.

"Whether it be clearing our sidewalks after a blizzard dumps feet of snow, cleaning up after a sick child, or preparing for an event and countless other daily duties that aid our school community, our custodians are always there to reach out with a helping hand. Every task is approached with diligence, kindness and a positive attitude," says Principal Kathleen Marzolf. "They work collaboratively to ensure that our school is not only aesthetically pleasing, but also a space where everyone feels comfortable and valued."

"They are always willing to go the extra mile," says Teacher Patricia Peddle. "They demonstrate great pride in the school and really make a difference in the lives of families and staff at Johnny Bright School."

"Beyond their job description, this team has consistently gone above and beyond to ensure that our school is a welcoming environment for our community," says Assistant Principal Jacqueline Baker. "Their contributions are a testament to the remarkable individuals who work behind the scenes to create a safe and nurturing educational environment."

"The team embodies the spirit of dedication, service and community that this award represents," says Principal Marzolf.

Recognition of Teams *continued*

Financial Services Duo, for service to L.Y. Cairns School

Manager Jeremy Higginbotham and Supervisor Monika Lukas are the members of this duo.

“Jeremy and Monika can be accurately described as a high-performance team,” says Principal Errol Johnson. “They demonstrate genuine caring and respect for the needs of our students. They realize that L.Y. Cairns is a unique site, and they work collaboratively with our school to ensure that we have the resources to provide every opportunity for our students and our staff to be successful.”

L.Y. Cairns is a Division site for students with a diagnosed mild intellectual disability and every student is coded. There are also a number of students who have complex needs—often with medical or behavioural diagnoses in addition to the cognitive disability. As a result, “We are frequently connected with Monika and Jeremy to discuss coding applications and the need for updated assessments or other specialized learning services,” says Assistant Principal Barbara Cameron. “They always demonstrate knowledge and patience, and are always readily available and willing to assist, teach and guide through the necessary processes.”

“Oftentimes, students have extremely complex needs and complicated diagnoses, and the applications and funding are required within very tight timelines,” says Assistant Principal Jeff Bone. “It’s during these situations that fluid collaboration, thoughtful conversations and expertise are of prime importance in order to provide time sensitive solutions and to allow our most vulnerable students access to the programming they so desperately need. In our experience, Monika and Jeremy have exemplified leadership that regularly goes above and beyond when serving these students and their families.”

Errol says, “They have worked endlessly for the benefit of our school and we consider them vital members of our school’s family.”

“They approach problems from an educator’s perspective—always teaching, always supporting, always with what’s best for students in front of mind,” says Jeff.

Muslim Support Team, M.E. LaZerte

The members of this team are Teachers Abdi Darod, Rabia El-Didi, Yasmeen Elladen, Taraff Haymour, Farooq Maseehuddin and Aya Murra, and Success Coach Zaki Hirabe.

In the words of Department Head Michelle Sabourin, “This group of staff are selfless, generous, patient and kind.”

Last April, students from Eastglen, Queen Elizabeth, Ross Sheppard and M.E. LaZerte schools gathered together to celebrate Ramadan and the rich Islamic community within these schools. “The event would not have been possible without the dedication and commitment of these team members,” says Student Success Liaison Naveed Chaudhry. Al Rashid Mosque Social Services and Program Coordinator Citra Ahmed says, “In a world that often emphasizes differences, the joint efforts of these four schools’ staff members and administrators, together with Al Rashid Mosque, serve as a shining example of the power of unity, collaboration and education. Their commitment to nurturing a sense of belonging and community among students is truly remarkable and deserving of recognition.”

“In addition to the Iftar dinner, they collaborated to support and represent Islamic culture in our school every day,” says Naveed Chaudhry. They organized Friday prayers, created a prayer room available to all students, organized the Muslims Students Association, collaborated with different mosques in the community, and connected with the Islamic Family and Social Services Association. Naveed Chaudhry says, “They do such important work daily to ensure the school community has cultural representation that is authentic and supportive of students’ needs.”

Their collective vision and unwavering dedication have not only brought together students of diverse backgrounds, but have also succeeded in creating an environment where students can learn and appreciate the significance of Ramadan.

For the first year ever, the school is offering an Islamic Studies course. This course came about from students wanting more opportunities to learn about their culture and heritage. “The staff supporting this class are modelling the importance of the pursuit of knowledge and being a proud Muslim,” says Michelle.

Recognition of Teams *continued*

Performing Arts Teacher Team, M.E. LaZerte

Teachers Daniela Pagliuso, Kayla Poon, Kelly Robinson and David Tremblay make up this team.

“All of our performing arts teachers are an important part of the culture at M.E. LaZerte,” says Assistant Principal Jason V. Smith. “Their passion and commitment makes M.E. LaZerte—a place where students can explore their creativity—an inspiration to new and seasoned teachers alike.”

Daniela Pagliuso put together numerous band performances, both at the school (the winter and spring concerts and an outdoor music festival with junior and senior high school students) and outside of the school (Whistler Cantando Music Festival, JazzWorks performances at the Yardbird suite). Kayla Poon and Kelly Robinson worked with dance students as part of the Spring Dance Showcase and Taste of LaZerte. “Kayla went above and beyond in the area of collaboration when she taught dance moves to our staff so they could perform in the Division’s welcome back to school video,” says Counsellor Paula Millham.

David Tremblay worked with drama students, putting together the improv group that regularly performs at various competitions throughout Edmonton. They all also collaborated together on the Celebration of Truth and Reconciliation, the performance of *Oz: The Musical* and student performances at the school’s open house.

“They have spent countless hours outside of the classroom, providing guidance, mentorship and encouragement to students who are passionate about music, drama and dance,” says Assistant Principal Jason D. Smith.

Paula says, “Our teachers offer a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment, so our students don’t just succeed, but thrive.”

Old Scona Custodial Team

This team is made up of Head Custodian Saare Gaim and Evening Custodian Ravindra (Ravi) Naicker. They are described as humble, patient, approachable, kind, reliable and dedicated.

Principal Will Deys says, “Saare and Ravi are a big part of what makes Old Scona an excellent place to learn and work. They care about their work, as well as about the people that they work with. They work well together and accomplish their duties easily and effectively.”

From the time of COVID-19 precautions to the recent school roofing project, Saare is constantly working with school staff and contractors to coordinate minimal disruptions to the school environment. He understands that school safety and cleanliness are his most important duties. As the night custodian, Ravi is always happy to help students who forgot something, or help with set-up and clean-up for evening functions, ensuring staff and students arrive at a clean school in the morning.

Assistant Principal Fred Kong shared that maintenance of a building from 1908 is made more challenging by the fact that, as a heritage site with a lot of hardwood flooring, they are limited in the types of cleaning agents that can be used. “At least one-third of the footprint is found in six flights of stairs!” says Fred. “What impresses me the most is the positive energy they bring to the school.” They’re known by students for their big smiles, and last year, they even helped several graduating students conduct a prank that had been approved by the administration.

Parent Maricel Reddy says, “Having served on the school council and the Friends of Old Scona Academic Society, Mr. Gaim and Mr. Naicker were always there to help out with whatever we needed for meetings and events, and always there to help clean up after our events. We are blessed to have a hard working custodial team who excel in their job and are positive role models.”

Ramadan (Iftar) Dinner Committee, Queen Elizabeth School

The members of this team are Department Heads Omar Abdullahi, Abbass Hojeij and Rajwa Shibley, Teachers Najla Rahall and Sara Yassin, and former Student Teacher Dalyah Mouallem. This team is described as collaborative, resourceful and talented.

“Their commitment to organizing and executing this event has consistently resulted in memorable experiences for our school community and has served as a platform to foster cultural understanding and harmony among our diverse student body and community,” says Assistant Principal Modey Amerey. The countless hours they devoted to this initiative’s success reflects their passion for enhancing the cultural fabric of the school. “They created a space where students and staff could come together to learn, celebrate diversity and strengthen their connections,” says Modey.

Last year, they recognized the power of including three other high schools (Eastglen, M.E. LaZerte and Ross Sheppard schools) in recognizing Ramadan. They took the initiative to collaborate in planning and carrying out an Iftar dinner that included all four high school communities. Their work also extended beyond the school’s walls. They helped bridge relationships with the broader community, helped form a foundation for further collaboration between the schools and enhanced the school’s reputation.

“It came as no surprise to me that these teachers and student teacher were willing to put in countless hours in support of their community,” says Principal Brent McKeown. “That is quite simply who they are as people and professionals; they are continually looking for ways to support and grow our larger school community.”

“Their tireless efforts in organizing and hosting events helped promote unity, understanding and dialogue,” says Assistant Principal Lisa Beebe.

Educational and Behaviour Programming Consultants, Specialized Learning Supports (SLS)

This team is composed of Consultants Neelam Boora, Jaime Clark, Robyn Davies, Jennifer Fedor, Shane Hewitt, Holly Isert, Victoria Kish, Carla Kozak, Megan Paran, Theresa Rojas, Kevin Schaffler, Sheldon Schmidt and Danielle Sinette.

Specialized Learning Supports Supervisor Leah Fraser says, “They provide significant contributions to the Division through response to behavioural crises in schools, proactive social-emotional-behavioural and educational programming for complex learners, and capacity building for all Division staff groups.” They collaborate with all disciplines, teaming up with school staff to develop interventions and strategies to increase student success.

Among many other things, this team helps identify students who need targeted and specialized interventions, works with learning teams to develop the resources, processes and skills needed to support complex students and classrooms with positive behaviour, and helps develop comprehensive literacy and numeracy strategies.

The 2022–23 school year saw the return of many students who had been learning online for two and a half years. This made for a very busy year for the consultants, supporting school staff with strategies to assist many students who struggled being back to a full day of in-person school. SLS Supervisor Alexis Renwick says, “Teachers are seeing increased complexity in the classroom, and are working to support all students with wide ranges of learning readiness and interests, language development, background knowledge, etc.”

“The work this team does on a daily basis helps to keep all school staff and students safer while also giving tools to deal with challenging situations as they come up,” says SLS Supervisor Treva Lunan.

They have also contributed to professional development throughout the Division. They have helped develop, deliver and fine-tune seclusion/time out training modules and have provided non-violent crisis intervention training.

Recognition of Teams *continued*

Low Incident: Teacher Consultants for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Educational Audiologists, Specialized Learning Supports (SLS)

This team is composed of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Teacher Consultants Kim Bizuk, Gerri Braye and Jacqueline Dahlen, Educational Audiologists Amber Darragh, Reanne Pernitsky and Krista Yuskow, and Intern Educational Audiologist Harley Comtois.

This team works collaboratively to support educational teams, students and families. They are instrumental in supporting schools with hearing assistance technology and often act as liaisons with hearing health care professionals in the community. They also help school teams develop specific teaching strategies. “They help families navigate community resources and family supports related to navigating assessment processes, accessing hearing technologies, and/or supporting families through medical systems,” explains Specialized Learning Supports Director Dave Bennell.

“They work tirelessly to assist students to maximize their communication skills while growing their academic, socioemotional and self-advocacy skills,” says SLS Supervisor Ross Ehalt. They organized and facilitated an in-person skill shop event for students who are deaf and/or have hearing loss. The intent was to support student well-being, increase students’ ability to advocate for their unique learning needs, and to develop new relationships with peers. Parents and caregivers were also invited so they could connect with each other.

“This team has contributed to capacity building in the Division by supporting teachers, educational assistants and school administration to better understand the impact of hearing loss on students and their academic success,” says Dave. They actively participate in the deaf and hard of hearing teacher community of practice at a provincial level, represent the Division at speaking engagements, and collaborate with the educational audiology community both provincially and internationally.

“The extent to which they serve and support students is something for which our Division can be most proud of,” says SLS Supervisor Billie Jo Scott.

Mental Health Capacity Building (MHCB) Team, Specialized Learning Supports (SLS)

This team is composed of Program Coordinator Tracy Mastrangelo, and Wellness Coaches David Campbell, Barrett Ferguson, Melanie Morrison, Clayton Prochnau, Elaine Rederburg and Amanda Wouldstra.

Last year, this team went from 13 wellness coaches to six. “With the leadership of Tracy Mastrangelo, this team transformed the way in which it delivered programming, and in fact, increased the number of students they were reaching,” says Specialized Learning Supports Supervisor Elizabeth Shen. Every classroom in the Division was given the ability to sign up for online opportunities with coaches, and learn about positive and preventative universal mental health supports. Wellness coaches engaged with students in ways that resonated with them—like presenting as a television celebrity. This team was even able to support community summer camps across the city.

They were also preemptive in their collaborative approach, meeting regularly and planning with members of Hospital School Campuses to implement universal supports. Hospital Campuses Assistant Principal Tricia Giles-Wang says, “The team has been pivotal in equipping everyone with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate the complexities of mental health. Their workshops, presentations and resources have been invaluable tools.” Collectively, numerous members of the Mental Health Capacity Building Ad Hoc Principal’s Committee shared that this team is passionate, knowledgeable, supportive, responsive, engaging, flexible and impactful.

“Through trying times, this team strengthened their bonds, created greater synergy and focused on continuous improvement. These innovations were even recognized and praised by members of Alberta Health Services who fund and oversee MHCB programs,” says Elizabeth.

Strathcona Track and Field Coaching Team

For this team, the head coach is Teacher Chris Buffi and the assistant coach is CTS Department Head Hung Ly.

“They inherited a program that was faced with difficult challenges,” says Principal Hans Van Ginhoven. League and organizational rule changes as well as the COVID-19 pandemic meant there were major changes to participation in track and field that the team had to adapt to. “Coaches Buffi and Ly met these challenges head on,” says Hans.

Chris and Hung worked hard to create events to rebuild the passion for track and field participation in the school. Regardless of the weather, they offered sessions after school, and worked to improve student biomechanics. “The amount of hours these coaches spent—everything from entering names and putting together rosters, to meetings and coaching recruitment—is underestimated,” says Athletic Director and Physical Education Department Head Joshua Spronk. He also explained the coaches helped team members navigate emotional situations, while keeping athletes focused.

It was an incredible effort to build the atmosphere that allowed students to not only learn track skills, but to be strong ambassadors for Strathcona School. “All their efforts to rebuild the team resulted in the team winning its 50th consecutive city championship,” says Hans.

“Their commitment to the Strathcona High School Track Team goes beyond their roles as coaches,” says Counsellor Tom Yonge. “They have played a pivotal role in shaping the team’s culture, fostering an environment of camaraderie, sportsmanship and unwavering school spirit.”

Svend Hansen School Staff Leadership Team

The members of this team are Teachers Tomi Brooks, Charity Brown, Kerri Clarke, Steven Inch, Jaine McCorquodale, Laura McGillivray, Paula McWilliams, Melissa Verster and Lisa Zimmer.

The staff leadership team at Svend Hansen School is described as committed, innovative, collaborative, adaptable and strategic.

“This team showed exceptional leadership and dedication driving the school-wide strategic plan for 2023–26,” says Principal Christina Jones. “Their commitment to collaboration within multi-division staff groups has fostered a culture of teamwork and innovation, resulting in enhanced educational experiences for both staff and students.”

“By bringing together staff members from different divisions, the team has been able to leverage diverse perspectives and expertise, leading to more comprehensive and impactful outcomes,” says Administrative Assistant Jessica McCafferty.

“They effectively aligned the goals and objectives of various divisions, ensuring a cohesive and unified approach towards achieving the school’s vision,” says Assistant Principal Darrell Paquette.

Christina says, “Through their leadership, the team has fostered a culture of continuous improvement and growth, inspiring others to strive for excellence in their respective roles.” They provided comprehensive, year-long professional development scope and sequence, and meticulously designed a program that addresses the evolving needs of staff. They also streamlined the calendar and organized Year 1, 2 and 3 actions outlined in the school strategic plan.

Their attention to detail helps ensure all initiatives are implemented in a timely manner. Darrell says, “Their strategic foresight and attention to detail have ensured that all initiatives are implemented in a timely manner. Through their diligent efforts, they have created a roadmap for success.”

“The team’s ability to navigate challenges and adapt to changing circumstances has been truly commendable,” says Jessica.

Recognition of Teams *continued*

PARENT/COMMUNITY

Friends of Forest Heights School Playground, Forest Heights School

The members of this team are Amanda Brayall, Christina Dombrosky, Geneva Espejel, Sylvia Harte, Anna Krall, Lynette Mueller, Elissa Nys, Alison Pulfer and Jill Tucker.

Over the course of five years, this team embarked on the time-intensive process of raising funds for a new playground. They were able to bring together parents, teachers, students and the broader community to reach a common goal. They spent countless hours organizing numerous events and securing funds through a variety of generous donors and supporters, including the Edmonton Public Schools Foundation who helped match donors to the project.

Thanks to their dedication, collaboration, contributions and diverse skills and experiences, this group helped turn the 30-year-old playground into a vibrant community hub. “Their tireless efforts have resulted in the complete revitalization of the playground, turning it into a safe, accessible and welcoming space for children of all abilities. Through their dedication, they transformed the schoolyard into a place of learning, laughter and community bonding” says Principal Carmen Geissler.

“The new space serves as an outdoor classroom where students have the opportunity to learn essential life skills, such as teamwork, problem-solving and social interaction,” says Teacher Carolyn Brown. “They also instilled in the students the values of unity and community involvement.”

Administrative Assistant Karen Janke says, “They have brought different generations together and created cherished memories for countless families.”

“Their teamwork has been nothing short of exemplary, fostering an environment of cooperation, creativity and determination,” says Carmen.

Twin Brooks Playground Team, George P. Nicholson School

Parents Kelly Casault and Amanda Powley were the leads on this team.

Kelly and Amanda are members of the Twin Brooks Community League and the school’s parent society and school council. “They are both kind, generous, humble and dedicated,” says Principal Geoff Sader. “They have been the catalyst for a great school community and exhibit the spirit of true voluntarism.”

Recognizing the playground next to the school was nearing the end of its life, they started a committee in 2017 to focus on the redevelopment of the playground. As the playground is an integral part of school recess, physical education time and is a community hub, they invited school administration to be a part of the committee. They lead numerous fundraising initiatives including a casino, dance concessions, skate nights and grant proposal writing. Through all their collective efforts and countless meetings, they were able to secure \$700,000 in funding.

Nominators shared that Kelly and Amanda did an amazing job collaborating and engaging with a variety of partners. They even arranged for several classes to visit a variety of new playgrounds so students could have a voice in deciding on new elements and concepts to be incorporated into the new playground. “Their vision, leadership and ability to mobilize support have been indispensable,” says Teacher Julie Jackie.

Assistant Principal Richelle Muth says, “As a direct impact of their remarkable efforts, a beautiful multi-age playground, catering to varying needs and interests, has become reality for the community.”

Grace Martin School Library Volunteers

This team is made up of Sharon Cairns and Karen Lange.

The library volunteers at Grace Martin School are described as joyful, calm and dedicated.

“These two ladies show so much initiative and collaboration as they work tirelessly to keep our library in operation. Their beautiful smiles and welcoming presence enhance the heart of our school,” says Teacher Marilyn Yakimets.

These two ladies process new resources, mend damaged books, create student library cards, shelve books, create interesting displays featuring new items, keep track of overdue materials, assist with inquiries, welcome parent and student volunteers, and establish routines for staff and students to keep the library running in an organized and efficient manner.

Their expertise in library and information studies is quite apparent. Through their love for books, knowledge and learning, they have made connections with staff, students and community volunteers on many levels.

“If it wasn’t for the two of them, our library would not run as smoothly as it does,” says Educational Assistant Shannon Klapstein. “The positive impact they have on our library cannot be overstated.”

Chandos Construction Team, for service to L.Y. Cairns School

The team leads are Iyja Nethersole and Chas Waitt.

L.Y. Cairns School’s mission is to provide meaningful experiences that help all students reach their highest possible level of achievement, especially in the area of employability.

After being invited to tour the school, Chas and his team were impressed with the students’ skills and made a commitment to support them. Over the past several years, Chandos Construction has provided access to resources and materials, expertise and guidance with identifying industry needs for employee skills, employment opportunities and more.

“Chandos Construction is the type of company that believes it is important to contribute to the social capital in our community,” says Principal Errol Johnson. “They provide our students with meaningful opportunities to do purposeful work as a member of their team. They truly see that the students have the ability to be contributing members to their team and our community.”

Assistant Principal Jeff Bone says, “They understand that focusing on being inclusive, collaborative, innovative and courageous is the path to success, and that diversity is a strength and everyone has unique abilities that allow businesses to be successful and healthy.”

Department Head Greg Lessmeister says, “Chandos Construction has greatly contributed to a sense of purpose, belonging and independence for these young employees! This has been life changing for these young adults and their families.”

The school truly believes Chandos Construction’s inclusive hiring policies are setting the standard for others to follow.

Recognition of Teams *continued*

Lillian Osborne School Council and Fundraising Association

The members of this combination team are: Christina Breault, Susan Burke, Karey Heard, Kathy House, Xia Huang, Fred Kong, Keertan Kullar, Monica Lane, Anathan Mahalingam, Priya Nelson, Vivian Shih, Kristi Slavens, Houda Trabelsi and Ling Yang.

This team is described as dedicated, supportive, positive, professional, genuine, collaborative and exceptional leaders.

“They consistently go above and beyond in their efforts to enhance the educational experience for students and the overall environment of the school,” says Assistant Principal Will Robertson. They have spent many hours fundraising for everything from resources and community-building activities to the MacLab Theatre and LOHS TV studio. These individuals have helped organize activities, events and initiatives that have directly benefited students and staff, and have helped enrich student learning opportunities—like the LOHS Live event (like TEDx) and a grand staircase student performance area.

They have also been strong advocates for the needs and concerns of the school community, ensuring the voices of parents and students are heard and addressed. One of their many contributions includes facilitating communication and collaboration between parents, teachers and school administrators. “They not only come to meetings to listen to the principal reports and what is happening in the school, they also actively ask how they can help make Lillian Osborne a better place,” says Assistant Principal Danny Jeffrey.

“This group goes out of their way to let staff know that they support and appreciate them,” says Teacher Darlene Scammell. Darlene shared that last year, this team spent many hours shopping and coming up with creative ideas to make staff feel valued. Every month, staff would receive a small token of appreciation—like a highlighter, stress ball or treat—with a beautiful note, thanking them for the work they were doing. “Knowing that parents are there to support you, and that they value the work that you do, is huge,” says Darlene.

PARENT/COMMUNITY AND DIVISION STAFF

Keheewin Outdoor Classroom Builders

This team is made up of parents Angela Bourassa, Dave Olsen, Lyndsey Olsen and Jessica Tanner, Assistant Principal Linda Nikolai-Wilson and former Keheewin Principal Beverly Oldford.

Beverly and Linda were instrumental in initiating the outdoor classroom project and this core group of parents jumped in to help make it a reality. “They worked tirelessly to engage staff and local community, and to collaborate with experts to ensure that the outdoor classroom would meet the highest standards of safety and educational value,” says Teacher Andrea Larsen. “They have spent countless hours planning, coordinating and overseeing the project.” Thankfully, the school’s fundraising efforts were supplemented by donations from Classic Landscaping.

The outdoor classroom comes complete with rock seating under a large sail hung from repurposed tree trunks salvaged from when the LRT line was built, trees, native plants and grasses, a weather station and musical instruments to allow students to experiment with sounds and rhythms. There was even a bonus surprise of gnomes for students to find and adopt. In the outdoor classroom, students can connect with and explore nature while experiencing hands-on learning. Several students collectively shared that they love the outdoor space and are so thankful. It makes them feel more relaxed while they do their work.

So far, students have been using the space for writing, science and art. A club is also being organized so students will take ownership of the upkeep of the space. In the spring, a human sundial and planter boxes will be added.

“The vision, volunteer hours, monetary donations—along with the desire to make Keheewin School even better—has given an amazing gift to the school and the larger community,” says Principal Tim Paetkau. “Not only has this beautified the front of the school, it has provided another amazing outdoor space in which students can work, explore, learn and enjoy for years to come.”

Recognition of Teams *continued*

Strathcona Senior Men's Basketball Coaching Team

This team consists of community members Dane Owen (head coach), Stanley Bateman and Jeff Menzi, and Department Head Josh Spronk.

For many years, the basketball program was often less prominent than other sports at Strathcona. In 2017, the coaching team worked hard to promote the program, even spending time at junior highs where they met with players and parents to share the benefits of attending Strathcona—including athletics, academics and arts programming. Each year, the basketball program improved and then, during the COVID-19 pandemic, athletic activities were paused. “Even under these circumstances, they found a way to start a club that adhered to AHS cohort guidelines so players could continue with development in a modified way,” says Assistant Principal Richard McAdie.

These coaches developed individualized workouts, recruited a diverse group of players, and gained more fan support within the school. “These coaches were mentors, role models, drivers and motivational speakers to the team,” says former Assistant Principal Narinder Riar. “They provided athletes with a person they could trust.”

“Their passion and values of accountability and commitment led the senior men’s basketball team to one of, if not the, greatest single seasons in program history,” says Athletics Department Head Kyle Palmer. During the 2022–23 season, the team went undefeated in league play, won the city championship in the last seconds of the game and went on to win the provincial championship. This was the first time since 1957 the school had won a basketball provincial championship.

Not only is Dane a strong head coach, he is also a positive role model in the school’s increasingly diverse community. He has been a part of very meaningful conversations that contribute to the school’s anti-racism initiatives.

PARENT/COMMUNITY, STAFF AND STUDENT

Cure-sader Cancer Support Team, Dr. Donald Massey School

This team is made up of parents Parveen Dhaliwal, Lisa Gaglione and Matt Gaglione (last year's school council chair), Physical Education Teacher Ian Burnet and Grade 9 student Jia Kumar. These remarkable individuals came together to help support awareness and fundraising for cancer.

Before the school's participation in the annual Terry Fox Run in June of 2023, Ian wanted students to understand the importance of the run. The morning of the run, Ian arranged for a cancer survivor to share his story in a school assembly. "It truly connected our community to why we give and choose to participate in the annual event," says Principal Cheryl Belyea. "As a result of Mr. Burnet's efforts, over \$7,500 was raised to fight cancer, more than doubling the school's previous year's donations."

In April 2023, the school learned a student was diagnosed with leukemia. The school council chair Matt, and his wife Lisa, were quick to support the student's parent, Cindy Morisot. They helped Cindy communicate with the school, made meals and helped with little chores around the house. As a nurse, Lisa was also able to help Cindy navigate medical appointments, terminology and treatments. Cindy says, "Lisa remained calm and took charge in a situation where I couldn't." Matt spent countless hours running popcorn sales to raise money to support Cindy while she attended treatments and cared for her child. "This allowed me to set aside some financial worry," says Cindy.

The support didn't stop there. "When Grade 9 student Jia learned her best friend was battling cancer, she decided she had to do something," says Jia's parent, Jeetendra Kumar. "She immediately took the initiative to start organizing a bottle drive." Parent Parveen Dhaliwal reached out to offer help as well. Jia and Parveen did everything from enlisting volunteers, to connecting with a bottle depot and arranging door-to-door pickups. The bottle drive raised \$2,000 for the family.

"I am so grateful for the huge hearts, kindness and loyalty this team has shown my family," says Cindy. Principal Belyea says, "All their efforts created a greater sense of belonging for both the students and community members."

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

Jared Henze, D.S. MacKenzie

Known for an inclusive, unique, fun and inventive approach to teaching at D.S. MacKenzie School, Jared Henze is described by students and their families as a positive role model, and a dedicated and passionate educator.

By making his classroom a space where all students can be themselves, working to ensure no student is left behind and incorporating a variety of approaches into his teaching, Jared provides an opportunity for outside-the-box thinking, according to Angela Halwa, a parent of former D.S. MacKenzie students.

Mike and Heidi Sharek's two children also had Mr. Henze as a teacher. "His class was a highlight for both of them. They both shared that his classroom was a place where they felt safe to be themselves, to learn in a supportive environment and always a guaranteed bright spot in their school day."

Testimonials from students emphasize Jared's inclusivity, connection, relatability and the positive impact of his teaching style. Families of students commend Jared for creating a safe and supportive environment, especially for 2SLGBTQIA+ students.

"I had the opportunity to work closely with Mr. Henze during my tenure as vice-chair and subsequently chairperson of the parent council," says parent Victoria Twanow. "As the teacher liaison, he consistently demonstrated enthusiasm and provided comprehensive updates on the progress and well-being of the students in his classes. His friendly demeanour and willingness to engage in open and honest discussion made him an invaluable asset to the council."

Jared is also recognized for the makerspace at D.S. MacKenzie, which is now part of a Division-wide project he is working on, as he would love to see all Edmonton Public Schools have makerspace areas.

Nic Potter, Dickinsfield School

Remarkable, profound and magic are a few of the words used by colleagues to describe Teacher Nic Potter's contributions since joining Dickinsfield School.

Nic has played a pivotal role in creating safe and inclusive spaces, supporting students' journeys to success and transforming the school's culture. Their efforts to support students of all backgrounds, create action towards anti-racism, evoke student voice, empower student leadership and be a strong champion for 2SLGBTQIA+ students makes them an invaluable member of the school community.

"Nic actively engages in conversations about diversity, equity and inclusion, challenging biases, fostering a culture of respect and understanding among students and staff, and ensuring that every student feels safe, valued and welcome in the classroom," says Principal Chelsea Erdmann.

By providing guidance to colleagues, mentoring new teachers and sharing expertise around intervention, instructional teaching practices, restorative practices and diversity education, Nic has positively impacted the entire staff. Their leadership has made the school more welcoming and inclusive, and has inspired countless colleagues to adopt innovative teaching methods.

"Nic's willingness to share their knowledge and experiences has empowered us to become better educators and, more importantly, better advocates for our students," says Teacher Dana Simmons, adding: "Nic's sense of responsibility toward the holistic development of our school community is truly commendable."

Beyond tirelessly supporting students and advancing important initiatives, Nic's dedication to organizing and leading interventions that impact students' academic growth is one of their best qualities. According to Assistant Principal Regena Mitzel, "Their ability to tailor interventions to individual students, offering support and encouragement every step of the way, has yielded remarkable results."

Dana Simmons, Dickinsfield School

Dana Simmons' exceptional impact at Dickinsfield School does not go unnoticed. In fact, according to Assistant Principal Regena Mitzel, "Students celebrate when they learn that Ms. Simmons will be their teacher!"

Dana is recognized by her colleagues for her outstanding dedication and efforts as a science teacher, for organizing and supporting special needs work within the school community, and for guiding novice educators on their journey to becoming effective and passionate teachers.

Principal Chelsea Erdmann says, "Dana's adaptability, patience and innovative teaching strategies help students with special needs succeed academically, as well as empowers them to build confidence and reach their full potential. Dana goes above and beyond to ensure that every student, regardless of their unique needs or challenges, has the opportunity to thrive in the classroom."

Teacher Nic Potter says, "Dana inspires them as a teacher, parent and leader, and praises her relationship-building skills, sense of humour, approachability, ability to create a nurturing environment and unwavering belief in the students she teaches. Dana Simmons is a true asset to the field of education, embodying the highest standards of teaching excellence in the context of special needs education."

Dana is also actively involved in various extracurricular activities and initiatives that enrich the Dickinsfield school community.

"It is evident that Dana's love of teaching is not just a profession but a calling," says Chelsea. "One that she approaches with boundless enthusiasm day after day."

Recognition of Merit *continued*

Simone Shirvell, Jackson Heights School

With more than 30 years of teaching experience, Simone Shirvell is known for being a wonderful colleague, who creates a caring atmosphere, builds strong relationships, and has exceptional teaching abilities and mentoring skills. A versatile and adaptable educator, Simone is celebrated for her deep passion for education and genuine commitment to the success and well-being of students.

Teacher Lani Schalin, of Keheewin School, calls Simone “a master teacher extraordinaire who has left a lasting impact on the schools she has worked in.”

Teacher Erin Pettipas, of Jackson Heights School, says, “Her service to this Division has been truly exemplary.”

During her time with the Division, Simone has taught various grade levels at numerous Edmonton Public Schools, spreading her teaching philosophies of kindness, empathy and breaking down barriers. By focusing on students’ needs and interests, and engaging them through an inquiry-based approach, Simone makes learning stimulating, meaningful and enjoyable with her creative lesson plans. Her warm and easygoing attitude makes her highly relatable and accessible, and also beloved by students, parents, and colleagues alike.

“One of the qualities that sets Mrs. Shirvell apart is her exceptional ability to connect with students on a personal level,” says Principal Chet Gosavi of Meyokumin School. “Mrs. Shirvell has a remarkable talent for understanding each student’s unique strengths, challenges and learning styles, enabling her to tailor instruction to meet their individual needs effectively.”

Simone engages students in impactful projects, such as growing microgreens and fundraising for the Mustard Seed. She has participated in leadership roles and program development related to early childhood education. Simone is also a board member of the Mahatma Gandhi Canadian Foundation for World Peace, advocating for social justice.

Simone is known for a deep connection to and love for nature as well, and emphasizes treating all living things with respect. This sticks with students, many of whom return to visit Simone and her class pet snake, Vader.

Phillip Eidick, Jasper Place School

Success Coach Phil Eidick has a reputation for being a compassionate and non-judgemental listener who can be persistent in all the right ways. Phil finds ways to reach students who are vulnerable, whether it's because of life circumstances or social situations.

Students and staff know Phil as a helper, supporter and friend, and bridge between school and community organizations for many families. He values strong relationships and is skilled at building them. In his role as Success Coach, he connects independent students and families with organizations like the Edmonton Food Bank, Youth Empowerment and Support Services (YESS), the Family Centre and the iHuman Youth Society. "Phil deals with the toughest situations, yet he does it with patience and kindness," says Brad Galloway, Department Head of Student Services. "Students genuinely feel respected and supported by his work."

Where Phil sees a need, he creates new initiatives, such as a resumé writing workshop, a career fair or the Feed A Rebel program. For some students, the work Phil does is the key to feeling they belong and can succeed at school. "There's never not a safe place in the school when his office door is open, no matter the problem, no matter when," says student Phinn Gray. Phil values relationships and has the ability to build them with students through a combination of empathy, persistence and even humour. "He doesn't give up, no matter how bad the situation, or how hopeless someone feels. Phil was the one who didn't give up on me, even when I had given up on myself," says Phinn.

Colleagues use words like "hero" and "icon" to describe Phil's presence at the school over the years. "Over the past 10 years, he has earned my utmost respect and I not only consider him a role model for our students, but for myself," says Assistant Principal Dusty Freimark. "Phil changes lives every single day. He is a gift to our community and we will never truly know the impact he has on our school family or greater community."

Recognition of Merit *continued*

Stephen Fong, Ottewell School

We all remember that special teacher who inspired us. Music Teacher Stephen Fong is one of those teachers. He approaches his teaching with a genuine and infectious appreciation for music and the belief that every student has a musical skill to be explored.

“He possesses an unwavering passion for music and a deep commitment to nurturing the musical talents of students,” says Principal Jason Smith. Using innovative teaching methods and an inclusive learning environment, he instils the idea that every single student has potential, value and skill as a contributor to overall success. “Under his leadership, our band has achieved remarkable success, earning accolades and recognition at both the local and regional levels.”

Stephen is a strong music educator, inspiring students to learn in fun and engaging ways. “Through highly interactive and dynamic lessons, Stephen takes music instruction to the next level, where students learn and have fun at the same time,” says Assistant Principal Colin Powles. He describes Stephen’s nature as calm, gentle and kind, radiating warmth that makes students feel safe and valued. “He is known for giving up his lunch break to work with students every noon hour, and the music room has a steady flow of traffic before and after school with students looking to connect with Mr. Fong.”

Stephen models patience and flexibility for students, adapting his teaching to meet their individual, diverse needs. “Mr. Fong not only imparts musical knowledge but also instils valuable life skills and character traits in his students,” says fellow Teacher Becky Lyons. “He prioritizes the development of discipline, teamwork, perseverance and strong work ethic... his students not only become proficient musicians but also well-rounded individuals.”

Beyond the classroom, Stephen is a dedicated lifelong learner, continuing to develop his teaching, collaborating with other music educators and furthering music education in the Division. He actively contributes to the music community by organizing musical events, performances, workshops and competitions that enhance learning for students and promote music education across the province. He encourages and inspires countless students and elevates the music program at Ottewell School.

Matthew Kleywegt, Queen Elizabeth School

Through his work at Queen Elizabeth and Eastglen schools, former Success Coach Matthew Kleywegt has helped many students feel they belong and can succeed at school. He advocates tirelessly for students and families and creates a positive, safe space in the school.

Passionate about equity and inclusion in education, Matthew has been a champion for Indigenous students, connecting them with the support and resources to thrive academically and personally. “By providing guidance, mentorship and a safe space for Indigenous students to express themselves and their cultural identities, Matthew has created an atmosphere where learning flourishes,” says Assistant Principal Modey Amerey.

Matthew is a compassionate and approachable person who can see the potential in every single student. At graduation ceremonies, students speak fondly of their time with him. “I have often heard the phrase ‘I might not have graduated if it weren’t for Matthew’ at numerous graduation events,” says Assistant Principal Blair Mitchell. “The Success Centre has become one of the safest places in our school and the group of youngsters who share the space at lunchtime has grown year over year. You can feel the positivity upon entering the space.” Matthew also organizes an annual camping trip that many students remember as a highlight of their high school lives.

His dedication and willingness to offer his time to support a student have made a lasting mark. “The systems he has established...have helped us achieve tremendous growth in graduation rates for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students through some of the most complex times in the history of education,” says Principal Brent McKeown. He has also taken the initiative to educate his colleagues on Indigenous history and perspectives by hosting a professional development session.

Matthew exudes a sense of calm and genuine caring that resonates with students, whether he’s helping with homework, career planning or simply being a listening ear. His commitment to students, families and the greater community have resulted in a more equitable and inclusive culture at Queen Elizabeth School.

Recognition of Merit *continued*

Christine Teplitsky, Strathcona School

Christine is an exceptional Art Teacher, respected colleague, leader in her field and dedicated advocate of the arts in school and beyond.

At Strathcona, Christine has built one the most successful Academic Placement art programs in Canada. “Today, it stands as a flagship in the fine arts discipline at Strathcona, with students consistently achieving 4s and 5s (the top score) year after year,” says Assistant Principal Natashya Shewchuk.

In her classroom teaching and beyond, Christine has transformed the school in big and small ways. Recently, she worked with an artist in residence to create a large tile mosaic telling the story of the school’s history. Take a walk through the school on any given day and you’ll see framed student art, updated regularly, in most spaces. With a keen eye for design, Christine takes pride in beautifying the space, showing off student accomplishments and recognizing and celebrating diversity, culture and community at the school.

Student Rosalie Briggs describes Christine’s class as a place where she has grown immensely as an artist. “From pottery painting to leather embossing and book binding, Ms. Teplitsky frequently gives her students chances to work with unique mediums that exceed the expectations of a traditional art class,” says Rosalie. “Without her, I would not be where I am today with my arts.”

Students praise Christine for being an unwavering champion of student work, building confidence in budding artists as they are finding their voice. Student Grace Josephine Cannon explains, “When a fellow student and myself entered the Denton Purple Art Contest promoted by the Art Gallery of Alberta, she went out of her way to help us showcase our work in the best way possible, promoting our participation by advertising our involvement to the student body in announcements and through the school’s social media.”

She shares her passion for the arts and makes time to connect students with grants and opportunities to expose their work through art festivals and venues like NextFest and the Art Gallery of Alberta. Former student Kira Slator says, “Her efforts to promote our artistic achievements have not only boosted our confidence, but also exposed us to the real-world applications of our skills.”

Christine also helps plan local events, such as art sales at the school and Scona Market, to help give students experience and exposure in a safe space. Most notably, she encourages students to create their own initiatives, like Tabula Rasa, a student-driven art festival that brings young visual artists together to share techniques and passion for painting, sculpture and collage.

“She has helped many students create competitive portfolios that got them into prestigious art and design programs at schools such as Emily Carr, Ryerson, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, Alberta University of the Arts and University of Alberta to name a few,” says Linette Smith, Department Head of Fine and Performing Arts. Under Christine’s guidance, students have received awards from the Alberta University of the Arts’ ShowOff! Competition, Environmental Artworks Contest and various scholarships and grant funding. “She truly has changed the way we see our building, our space, our school.”

Tomi Brooks, Svend Hansen School

Teacher Tomi Brooks has a deep love of literacy and learning that comes through in her teaching and leadership at Svend Hansen School. She promotes literacy in fun and engaging ways at every opportunity and fosters an early love of reading in students.

Tomi spearheads the school's annual Thunder Into Reading event, a school community celebration of literacy that brings families together and shares literacy best practices. It has since become a school tradition enjoyed by students and families. "Tomi's ability to engage families and promote literacy beyond the classroom is truly commendable," says Principal Christina Jones. "Tomi's leadership and camaraderie have greatly contributed to the overall success of our school community."

She also led the initiative to bring the Mini Legends program to the school. Through the program, students learn about physical literacy and values such as discipline, perseverance and sportsmanship. Her outstanding leadership in literacy initiatives and other events are not only fun for students but also good learning opportunities.

Tomi is an exceptional teacher who knows how to make learning both fun and engaging for her Grade 2 students, across various abilities. Her colleagues use words like creative, vibrant and dynamic to describe her classroom and teaching methods. Most notably, she creates a space where young students are excited to learn. "Her ability to create a stimulating learning environment has resulted in remarkable academic growth among her students," says Teacher Jessica Lamont. She is able to shift and adapt her teaching methods to reach every student, and remains committed to providing diverse opportunities to students throughout the school.

With her colleagues, Tomi is generous with her time and expertise and always willing to partner on projects that benefit staff and students. "Her willingness to share her expertise, collaborate on projects and provide guidance has created a supportive and collaborative work environment," says Teacher Kerri Clarke. "Tomi's dedication to the success of her colleagues is a testament to her exceptional leadership skills and her commitment to the overall growth of our school community."

Recognition of Merit *continued*

Simplicio (Sim) Garnica, Victoria School

Charge Hand of the Victoria School custodial team for more than 10 years, Simplicio is an outstanding custodian who leads with care, compassion and empathy. He is always willing to help with the many initiatives and events that are beyond regular school maintenance, such as renovation cleanup, summer school cleanup, handling night group rentals, parent requests and students that ask for his help. “He is often our ‘go-to guy’ who is insistent on supporting every which way he can,” says Kerri Neitsch, Curriculum Coordinator of the Arts at the school. “He pulls his team together in an admirable manner, ensuring everyone knows their value and that their contributions lead to success.”

Also responsible for security in the evenings, Simplicio often engages with community members who need assistance and encouragement to find other places to rest. He handles these interactions with grace and a commitment to safety and well-being in the school and community.

Simplicio is respected and valued because of his efficient, high-quality work and his focus on continuous improvement. Shelly Leroux, Ceramics Teacher at Victoria School, describes her classroom as a challenge to clean because the clay gets everywhere, especially when it goes down the sink and leads to backups. “Without his hard work, my sink would not drain properly and cleaning up can be very difficult,” she says. “His amazingly positive attitude and willingness to help others are valued by Simplicio’s peers, who often rely on him to get the job done.”

His fellow colleagues describe Simplicio as an inspirational and capable person who will always greet you with a smile and great professionalism. What stands out is his exemplary leadership of the custodial team, his ability to create connections within and outside of his department, and his willingness to jump in when his expertise is needed. “Simplicio consistently displays great leadership by relaying information to and from his team and is continually going above and beyond by jumping in when fellow staff have an emergent issue, working to get a machine up and running again during a time crunch, or coming in to help with emergent situations such as a recent flood cleanup,” say Assistant Principal Wendy Plum.

Thank You.

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