

Issue two
2019-20

the torch



(Left to right) Trustees John Toews, Rod Giesbrecht, Peter Kotyk, and Brianne Goertzen at École Regent Park. Student population growth has proven both an exciting opportunity and a challenge for the division.

Our communities are growing

Change is a reality and an opportunity. For River East Transcona School Division, some anticipated changes are the new residential developments that will bring more families and students to the division. The board of trustees prepares for such changes by planning well ahead to be able to welcome and accommodate new students to our schools.

"Our division is growing substantially, with more plans continuing to come. This brings along new energy and excitement in our schools and our community," said trustee Brianne Goertzen. "As a board, we assess the growth

with the new students from the new subdivisions and then we consider how and where we can accommodate them. This includes considering school capacities, staffing, resources, and transportation."

When the board plans for population growth, it first must look at available space in existing schools before applying for renovations, expansions, or new schools. At present, Bernie Wolfe School, French milieu, and early years schools are at or near capacity, whereas middle years schools are near 80 per cent capacity. While only a few schools in the River

East area have space concerns, anticipated growth north of the Perimeter Highway may change this. In Transcona, there are three new developments bringing with them considerable student population growth.

In Transcona, there are a potential four new developments bringing with them considerable student population growth. "Today we find ourselves in discussions with the province about responding positively to growth and giving significant thought into just what our solution should look like. We know a generation is waiting for the answer," commented trustee

Rod Giesbrecht. "That's why the board continually monitors changes in student population and plans ahead to come to an effective and appropriate solution."

Building a new school is rarely an option. The provincial government expects other options to be explored, which means filling existing seats in schools before it will consider and approve funding for a new school. For that reason, the RETSD board has planned for student growth by first looking at where and how it could adjust catchments to balance students and programs among different schools.

Continued on the next page...

The trustees understand this kind of change is not easy for families and the board works hard to keep students as close to home as possible.

Larger developments are required to set aside land for different amenities including green spaces and land for schools. This is not a guarantee that a new school is an option. The board monitors enrolment and capacity in our schools and keeps the government

informed of this data.

It's been 30 years since a new school was built in RETSD—Collège Pierre-Elliott-Trudeau in 1990. In 1988, Joseph Teres School was built as a result of a new development along Plessis Road and in 1987, Sun Valley School was built because of a new development. Also, in 1987, Bird's Hill School was relocated and the old school building replaced.

Even if we are unable to build a

new school, the board still must plan for additional resources for more students. This can include more staff—such as teachers and educational assistants—as well as more furnishings, including desks and other classroom supplies.

During the planning process, the board will determine the designated school for students from the new developments. Transportation is provided to eligible students based on living

1.6 km from their home residence to the school. Developers are encouraged to provide proper sidewalks or walking paths to increase student safety.

Student population growth is upon us—it is an exciting opportunity and challenge for the division. It requires the board to plan in detail to ensure we continue to help create student success in every school.

Full sTeam ahead



Trustee Rod Giesbrecht visits students in the sTeam program classrooms at Murdoch MacKay Collegiate—sTeam stands for “science and technology interpreted through engineering and the arts, all based in mathematical elements.”

The sTeam programming continues to evolve and expand at Murdoch MacKay Collegiate after a successful launch in 2018. Learning through a sTeam philosophy gives students opportunities to build their skills and focus on high-potential careers. The program is project-based, inquiry-driven, and includes partnerships with industry, post-secondary institutions, and government.

The Institute for Arts Integration and STEAM (educationcloset.com) says the program results in “students who take thoughtful

risks, engage in experiential learning, persist in problem-solving, embrace collaboration, and work through the creative process.” We are seeing this come to life in River East Transcona School Division.

The word sTeam stands for “science and technology interpreted through engineering and the arts, all based in mathematical elements.” The capital “T” in sTeam puts the focus on how the ethical and responsible use of technology supports critical thinking, problem-solving,

creativity, and communication. This year, a third teacher has been added to the program, while many others are getting involved and learning about the teaching practice through mentorship and class observation.

“This initiative provides students with a greater understanding of where their learning is intended to take them and increases ownership for the results,” said trustee Rod Giesbrecht. “I wish I had something like this when I was a student.”

Last year, 20 Grade 10 students—led by two teachers—spent

mornings of the second semester in the program fulfilling their science, English Language Arts, and arts requirements. This year, a new group of Grade 10 students will experience the approach, while last year’s Grade 10 students will be able to continue to sTeam ahead in Grade 11.

The sTeam learning replaces more traditional classroom structures with collaborative initiatives geared to solve important issues tied to the United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals. For the goals, visit: www.un.org. Students benefit from a global perspective through their learning and from the knowledge that, together, they can create and implement solutions.

The division is excited about how sTeam students see the connections between senior years subjects and the world of work. And sTeam is also giving a new lease on school to some students who hadn’t previously been challenged and motivated in their learning. One student discovered he wrote more in a single term in his sTeam class than ever before, because the opportunity to walk around, talk, and think led to more ideas, better focus—and no more boredom.

RETSD engaging more students to graduate



Diverse and engaging programming has helped RETSD maintain graduation rates above Manitoba averages.

River East Transcona School Division students are graduating at rates above Manitoba averages and the numbers are increasing. The division is committed to help students graduate. We offer a range of options and programs students can choose in senior years, such as vocational programming, sTeam, dual diplomas and more, all helping students stay in school and find a path to graduation that works for them.

"We look for the passions and strengths in students, instead of focusing on their deficits," said board vice-chair Jerry Sodomlak. "Knowing what they are interested in and where opportunities are

help us understand the programs to offer while encouraging students to finish school, graduate, and provide them with skills to choose their path for the future."

One such grad is Brittany Millinchuk—a Murdoch MacKay grad (class of 2007) who participated in the Metals and Aerospace Technology program for four years.

"I ended up convincing two of my closest girlfriends to join with me and we all ended up loving it," said Brittany. "We worked on the lathes and milling machines and even worked on a small aircraft that one of the other teachers had brought in."

Today, Brittany is a quality manager at a machine shop and she says many of her fellow program peers are working in the trades, including aerospace. The position is just what she was looking for and Brittany uses all the skills she learned at Murdoch.

Another popular vocational program is Culinary Arts at Kildonan-East Collegiate—and not just because students prepare and serve delicious food to staff and students.

"Culinary/Pastry means so much to our students because they feel like they've achieved something after they've made it and they feel good about it," said program instructor Jamie Labiuk. "They also get to

experience the practical skills and theory that are needed to become successful in the culinary industry."

Partnerships with RBC Convention Centre and Bell MTS Place give the students valuable work experience and many of them get hired after school. Grade 11 student Magie Kabonesa loved her work experience at both locations—she became attached to her co-workers and was excited when it was a workday. At first she was unsure if she would enjoy cooking, but it was the right path for her.

"In Grade 9, I started to realize my passion for cooking and serving others," Magie said. "Every day is a new day for me to learn. The staff and teachers have always been the other reason I look forward to the class."

Undergraduate awards are another reflection of the overall success of our senior years students, with more than 50 per cent of Grade 9 and about 35 per cent of Grade 12 students attaining honour roll status. This is one of the outcomes of offering a range of opportunities for students to find and showcase their unique strengths.

The division is committed to helping students not only graduate, but graduate with success and opportunities to follow their passions in school and beyond.

On time/four years graduation average rates	2013	2018
RETSD Grads	80%	84%
All Manitoba Grads	76.2%	79.9%

Five years graduation average rates	2014	2018
RETSD Grads	85.1%	87.4%
All Manitoba Grads	80.4%	83.1%

Average graduation rates measured by "on time/four years" and "five years" rates. Some students may take longer than four years to graduate for a variety of reasons, such as working and going to school part-time.

RETSD and WSO—making beautiful music together for 15 years



photo by Chronic Creative

Vocalist Jeremy Koz, singing Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* with the WSO and the RETSD Middle Years Percussion Ensemble, directed by Jeff Kula.

October 2019 marked the 15th anniversary of a very special partnership RETSD has with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra to showcase the amazing musical and artistic talents of our students at

an annual concert.

This partnership—the only one of its kind in Manitoba—began in a school gym and now sells out the Centennial Concert Hall every year.

"We trust one's RETSD educational journey is unique, challenging, and rewarding. Music, singing, and art are an important part of the journey," said trustee Peter Kotyk. "Thus, RETSD and the WSO partnered a number of years ago to offer our students an experience of a lifetime. To play in concert, celebrating musical, choral, and artistic student achievements while engaging with our supportive community—truly a win-win for all."

Brent Johnson, WSO education and community engagement manager, is amazed by the passion of the educators who work tirelessly to prepare all the young musicians.

"They put in so much energy and go above and beyond because they love and cherish this partnership and the unique opportunities it provides for RETSD students," said Johnson.

Jean-François Phaneuf, WSO VP of artistic operations & community engagement, remembers the very first concert in a cramped gym 15 years ago. Students' faces revealed their excitement to be performing with the WSO, he said, and parents, "were overcome with emotions, taking pictures and video of their child singing with our orchestra. That magical moment will always stay with me."

Keeping students safe

RETSD is committed to providing safe and healthy schools for everyone—students, staff, parents, and other visitors. The division has a range of programs, policies, and training to support this commitment and invites parents to let the school know if they have any concerns about a child's safety.

Open communication between home and school is important. The division has developed a Concern Protocol explaining how to look

into and address a concern. The first step is to contact your child's teacher. If that does not resolve your concern, then parents/guardians can ask the school principal for support. The next step, if parents/guardians are still not satisfied, is to contact the superintendent's department. In the unlikely event your issue is still not resolved, parents/guardians can contact the board of trustees.

Sometimes a parent or caregiver may hear about a situation at their child's school, even though their child was not involved. The division

must respect the privacy of those who were involved and may not be able to share details, including any student disciplinary actions taken.

"We respect the privacy of all students and families and are required by law to protect that privacy," said trustee Susan Olynik. "At the same time, we are fully committed to safety for all students and division employees. Anything that could pose a risk to that safety is treated very seriously."

One of the many ways the division promotes safety and prevents

issues from arising is through the universal implementation of Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS). This uses a positive way to teach students what is expected of them and help them understand what actions are acceptable and what are not. There are divisional PBIS coaches who work with all our schools to create safe places where responsible and respectful behaviour is the expected norm.

For more, please visit retsd.mb.ca for divisional policies, protocols, and Code of Conduct brochure.

Your River East Transcona School Division Trustees

Ward 1

Colleen Carswell (chair)
204.222.1486
ccarswell@retsd.mb.ca

Jerry Sodomlak (vice-chair)
204.999.1409
jsodomlak@retsd.mb.ca

Ward 2

Rod Giesbrecht
204.661.5984
rgiesbrecht@retsd.mb.ca

John Toews
204.663.0475
jtoews@retsd.mb.ca

Ward 3

Brianne Goertzen
204.955.6782
bgoertzen@retsd.mb.ca

Keith Morrison
204.795.3357
kmorrison@retsd.mb.ca

Ward 4

Peter Kotyk
204.668.4181
pkotytk@retsd.mb.ca

Susan Olynik
204.661.6440
solynik@retsd.mb.ca

Ward 5

Michael West
204.990.3228
mwest@retsd.mb.ca

The board holds its regular meetings on the first and third Tuesday of the month starting at 6:30 p.m. at the RETSD Administration Offices, 589 Roch St. All regular board meetings are open to the public. For more information about the board of trustees, visit: www.retsd.mb.ca/BoardofTrustees