



President's Message: Red letter month?

The arrival of February on the calendar reveals defining colours on the canvas. Classrooms become enrobed in scarlet decorations thanks to the talents of our early/middle years colleagues. High school folks must wade through hormonal teenagers, some green with envy, while trying to teach amid the volley of Cupid's arrows. Educators across the board promote the limitless colour palette to our imaginations for "I Love To Read Month", and we hope tax season finds us in the black.

We often use the term 'red letter day', which means 'a day that is pleasantly noteworthy or memorable.' Will this month reveal any red-letter days for teachers in Manitoba? In Canada? In Ontario, our colleagues are embroiled against a government moving for class size increases, reductions to funding-per-pupil, e-courses to replace teachers, as well as changes to teacher training and hiring. All Ontario teacher unions are now involved in rotating strikes and will hold a one-day province-wide strike on February 21. It will affect nearly 5,000 schools and 2 million students.

In Quebec, education reform, saw the passing of Bill 40 this month, which aims to abolish school boards. Instead, Educational Service Centres will be formed, composed of parents, community members, and staff, with the percent composition in most cases, higher for parents than staff. The government has said this will put more power in the hands of the parents, and reforms to teacher training, the role of school directors and how educational services are managed are also on the horizon. With an ashen sky all around, it is natural to consider what hues will be revealed to us, as we approach the release of the K-12 Review recommendations in the coming weeks.

A sneak peek was shaded in by the 2020-21 Provincial Funding announcement last week. The Interlake School Division stands to face a fourth year of a 2% funding decrease, with a projected 0.4% decrease in enrolment. In the overall provincial budget, education appears to have a 0.5% increase, but is a fourth straight year of falling short of the rate of inflation. The province has directed municipalities to stay below 2% tax increases, they soon plan to remove school taxes altogether, and have directed school boards to reduce management costs by 15%.

It has been a year of hurry up and wait; or more like hold our breath until we become blue, for teachers. If there is a silver lining, it is that MTS President James Bedford has had several recent meetings with Minister Goertzen, and he along with the President of MSBA and ISD Board Chair, Alan Campbell, have both indicated that there does seem to be a sense that the province looks to consult with education partners once the Review recommendations are released. How this will take shape remains to be seen, of course. So, what will this look like in ISD? The ISD Public Budget Meeting is Thursday, Feb. 20, 5:30pm at the Heritage Arts Centre. Two items of interest will be where the 15% management cut will be factored in, and what the proposed mill rate will be. Keep an eye on www.mbteach.org and www.interlaketeachers.ca for updates.

➤ **Update on Bill 28 court battle:** Closing arguments in the case against the Public Services Sustainability Act were heard this week - [LINK](#). K-12 Commission's Recommendations are expected this coming month as well. There is no new information from the locals in arbitration.

➤ **ITA Public Relations Initiatives Continue:**

One of the goals set out by your executive this year was to increase the profile of our profession to both members and the community. Here are some up-coming events where you will see us:

- **Thursday February 20, ISD Public Budget Meeting – 5:30 – 7:30pm** at the Heritage Arts Centre. Please join us as for your opportunity to ask Senior Administration and ISD Trustees the tough questions regarding the proposed 2020-21 ISD Operating Budget.
- **Monday March 9, PD day Lunch sponsored by ITA** – As we head toward a time of uncertainty regarding the future of our local, the ITA executive would like to extend an invitation to have lunch at both PD locations on March 9 for ALL staff.
- **Wednesday, April 22, Wellness Expo** - 3pm, Ecole RW Bobby Bend School. Stop by the ITA booth and enter to win a prize.

➤ **Don't forget to sign up for the Public Relations Committee:**



If you love to plan events and envision occasions to bring a diverse group of teachers together during the school year, please join this committee. From making some phone calls, to being part of a dream team of event planners, or helping out with an event that sparks your interest. Contact Sheila Anderson at Rosser School, sanderson@isd21.mb.ca.

➤ **NOTICE OF CALL: ITA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING and MTS PROVINCIAL COUNCIL**

ITA AGM & EXECUTIVE ELECTIONS – The Interlake Teachers' Association AGM will take place **Tuesday, April 21, 4:30 pm at SCI**. If you are thinking of working on behalf of your colleagues, check in on the positions on our website, www.interlaketeachers.ca. To run, please contact electoral officer, Mark Lawson (mlawson@isd21.mb.ca), Principal teacher at Rosser School.

MTS PROVINCIAL COUNCIL & ELECTIONS – Delegates from your executive will attend Provincial Council in Winnipeg from May 20 – 23, 2020. If you are interested in running for PX (provincial executive), please contact Cathy at president@interlaketeachers.ca for nomination info.

➤ **Interlake Community Foundation grants \$25,000 for Gender Equality Project - #Talk, eh?! (Transforming Attitudes Learning Kindness, Expanding Horizons?!)**

The Why - Promoting healthy positive self-identity in our female identified students, that empowers them to find a strong voice and have healthy relationships with the world around them.

The What - #Talk, eh?! is a collaborative project between the ISD High Schools (SCI, TCI and WCI) and The Infinity Program (TIP). The Interlake Community Foundation recently presented \$25,000 toward this new initiative, that they hope will advance gender equality. The goal is to help female identified students in ISD find and share their voice.

#Talk, eh?! Project (continued)

The plan is for a two-day event at Oak Hammock Marsh where sixty students from the Interlake School Division will come together. Guest speakers of the event include Samra Zafar. *'After escaping a decade of abuse living as a child bride in a forced marriage in Canada and sharing her story, Samra Zafar became a beacon of hope for many people facing exclusion, abuse, and gender-based violence. Now an award-winning international speaker, author, scholar, and entrepreneur, she engages audiences around the world speaking about collective resilience, authentic leadership, inclusive workplaces, youth, human rights, mental health and more.'* (www.speakers.ca)

The first day's program will continue featuring Sarasvati, a well-established theatre group that has been instrumental in advancing gender equity through many of their works, such as 'FemFest.' Sarasvati will facilitate the exploration of healthy self-identity, and seeking out allies and positive relationships, that those who are female identified have in the world around them.

Day 2 will see the larger group broken into three groups to create artistic pieces that share their voice on these topics. Through drama, vinyl recordings and embroidery, students will share their learning with others. By the end of the day, pieces will be complete and plans regarding how to share them will be solidified. The intention is for these newly formed voices to be shared with our greater school communities. **Have interested students talk to your Principal.**

According to a 2017 report by stats Canada, Manitoba was listed as having the second highest rate of violence against girls and women in the country. The rate of violence for women and girls in rural Manitoba was 1.8 times higher than that in urban centers. Stats Canada data from our 2016 Census also shows that on average women in the Interlake earn less than men, by just over \$17,000. When you dig a little deeper, you see that the divide between males and females becomes greater as income increases. Four times more men than women make over \$100,000, even though more females in the Interlake have a higher degree of education than males.

Simply put, we have a well-educated female population that does not translate into higher wages or safety for this group. We need to promote talking about these issues. Our female identified population need to feel safe and supported to find and share their voices. That is at the heart of this project. Attitudes need to be changed from all perspectives, and we will only get there through open safe education and conversation.

Did you know? – If we are to consider ourselves as allies for our students as they self-identify, we should be mindful in our classrooms and community when using the word 'transgender'. In speaking with experts, some feel that transgender is a word that ostracizes more than it includes. The Rainbow Resource Center offers the suggestion that using 'female or male identified', is far more inclusive. This project is sure to educate through its voice and findings, and we look forward to its aiding in awareness, mindfulness and supporting equality through communication and collaboration. Thank you to the ISD High School Principal Teachers for applying for this grant, and particularly to Laura Perrella from WCI for steering the project.