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**MANITOBA'S EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION
AWARDS RECIPIENTS**

Teaching Excellence Award

Amanda Almdal, David Livingstone Community School, Winnipeg School Division

As the nursery to Grade 3 learning support teacher, Almdal has a passion for fostering student and staff growth and has had a profound impact on all who are fortunate enough to collaborate with her. She nurtures each student's potential by providing them with multiple opportunities to engage in, represent and express their learning. She creates opportunities for hands-on, play-based learning that activates students' creativity and critical thinking, while fostering their social and emotional development. Through small group work, individualized projects and peer partnerships, Almdal helps students build communication and teamwork skills and through movement-based activities such as yoga, she helps develop their fine and gross motor skills as well as self-regulation. Almdal is a master at differentiated instruction, individualizing student learning through regular formative assessment to meet students' diverse needs, build their confidence and foster of a love of learning. Almdal willingly shares the vast pedagogical knowledge she has acquired over her 27-year teaching career, serving as team teacher, mentor and leader of the primary professional learning community. Almdal plays an integral role in shaping a positive and inclusive school culture, where students and staff alike can thrive, making her an exemplary teacher and an indispensable part of the school's success.

Teaching Excellence Award

Jenna Desilets, Ste. Anne Elementary School, Seine River School Division

As a Grade 5/6 teacher at Ste. Anne Elementary School, Desilets personifies excellence in the teaching profession through her child-centred focus and ability to make all learners successful. In her classroom, she provides a caring and safe environment with flexible seating, cozy corners, soft lighting, music, plants and a cereal station. Desilets models and teaches an array of strategies for self-regulation and provides opportunities for students to explore and practise those that are most effective for them throughout the day. She is attuned to her students, meeting them where they are by creating engaging, differentiated and cross-curricular activities that are mindful of their interests and strengths. Desilets honours Indigenous perspectives throughout her teaching and has become a key resource person on Indigenous education in the school. From 2018 to 2024, she served on the Seine River Teachers' Association and chaired its Indigenous education committee for four years. In this capacity, she developed support material for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Desilets, who has boundless energy, is a keen collaborator and organizer of school events such as literacy and family nights and community clothing swaps. She also readily supervises music and sporting activities and co-facilitates the student leadership group. Desilets is a remarkable, yet humble, educator whose great commitment and contributions to her school community are deserving of recognition.

Teaching Excellence Award

Justin Valentino, R. D. Parker Collegiate, Mystery Lake School District

As a teacher at R. D. Parker Collegiate, Valentino is dedicated to ensuring all his students, whatever their skill level, feel that they belong and can succeed. He teaches grade 9 to 12 physical education, hockey and lifesaving courses, as well as the IDEAL Program that is designed for students living with exceptional physical and/or psychological needs. He makes a great effort to offer students creative activities and exercises that encourage full participation and engagement. Valentino communicates and collaborates with colleagues to provide his students with additional supports such as scheduled grade check-ins, study hall, tutoring services, counselling and Indigenous resources. Valentino also coaches the high school golf, ice fishing and track teams and contributes to the community as a volunteer firefighter with the Thompson Fire and Emergency Services, a first aid and CPR instructor, and a coach for the local U18 AAA hockey team. It should be noted that his players' school attendance rate has increased significantly since he began scheduling hockey practices and workouts in the early morning for them to be successful student-athletes. Whether in class, in sports or out-and-about serving the community, Valentino is a tremendous role model who instills in his students resilience, responsibility, perseverance and sportsmanship.

Outstanding New Teacher Award

Jonathan McPhail, Exchange Met School, Seven Oaks School Division

McPhail left his former career in film and business to pursue a call to the teaching profession, choosing to work at the Exchange Met School, a satellite school of West Kildonan Collegiate. As a Met school teacher advisor, he accompanies the same group of students for all four years of high school, ensuring that all learning outcomes for compulsory subject areas are covered through student-centred projects and internships. McPhail has embraced his role by fostering close relationships with students and families, demonstrating educational creativity and drawing on the knowledge and experience within his network including community members. He has invited many experts to his classroom to help make learning authentic, relevant and impactful. For instance, he partnered with a local credit union to teach real-world financial literacy and invited professional architects to work with students in connecting math to the process of designing warming huts. McPhail has helped establish a student leadership group that has led school-wide events such as potlucks, cultural celebrations and a camping trip. He also organized student participation in the Nuclear Peace Summit and revived the school composting project while promoting environmental sustainability. In response to student interest, he also established a film group that recorded and edited a video yearbook that was showcased at graduation. McPhail's innovative practices and unwavering commitment to his students and community make him an exceptional new educator.

Outstanding Team Collaboration Award

Katelyn Hart, Kelly Mikkelson, and Rachel Novak, Green Valley School, Hanover School Division

Hart, Mikkelson and Novak, three Grade 5/6 teachers, worked collaboratively to implement “looping” at Green Valley School, a practice by which teachers advance from year to year with the same class. To ensure successful implementation of this approach, these teachers teamed up to learn from and build on each others’ strengths in developing cross-curricular learning activities that include effective differentiated teaching strategies related to numeracy and literacy. Through the co-development of their looping practice, these teachers were able to build greater rapport with their students, respond more effectively to their individual needs and enable a more seamless transition from one school year to the next. As a result of their efforts, students displayed an increased sense of belonging and confidence in class. They were also less anxious at the start of their second year with their teacher, evidenced by positive behaviours in the classroom. Hart, Mikkelson and Novak’s collaborative spirit, commitment to positive relationships with students and colleagues and innovative mindset have ensured that the looping practice, implemented for the first time at the school, has had remarkable and sustainable results.

Outstanding School Leader Award

Caleigh Matni-MacDonald, formerly of Chan Kagha Otina Dakota Wayawa Tipi School, Frontier School Division

As principal, Matni-MacDonald transformed Chan Kagha Otina Dakota Wayawa Tipi School through her exceptional leadership, dedication and innovative approach to education. She established multiple initiatives to support professional and personal growth in both staff and students. Matni-MacDonald ensures teachers, educational assistants and support staff have the resources and training needed to succeed. She organizes regular professional learning days on topics such as verbal intervention. She also encourages collaboration and mentorship and co-ordinates staff appreciation celebrations. Matni-MacDonald also provides numerous opportunities for her students to develop skills, explore interests and connect with their cultural heritage and the broader community. She introduced a flexible school-day cycle to accommodate a variety of activities such as golf, beading, guitar, drumming, cooking and calligraphy. She introduced a variety of extracurricular and after-school programs including ribbon skirt-making workshops, powwow clubs, elder luncheons, babysitting courses and tutoring. She brings in motivational speakers, organizes career fairs that include post-secondary education representation and facilitated a school trip to Ottawa and Montreal. Matni-MacDonald also established a student council where students share ideas, collaborate and lead school activities while cultivating a more engaged and motivated student body. Matni-MacDonald consistently goes above and beyond to create a thriving learning environment for students and staff alike. This January, she became principal at Philomène Chartrand School in Camperville.

Premier's Award for Excellence in Education

Laurie Bachewich, Erickson Elementary School and Erickson Collegiate, Rolling River School Division

As principal of two schools, Erickson Elementary School and Erickson Collegiate, Bachewich has had an immediate, profound and lasting impact on staff, students, and the surrounding communities. She embraced the schools' joint vision of Mino-Pimatisiwin (the good life) and has fostered school cultures that nurture heart, mind, body and spirit, where each child's uniqueness is respected and celebrated. Knowing that a strong, cohesive staff is foundational to success, Bachewich was quick to mobilize her teams in a collaborative and supportive way, to unite on values and strategies that contribute to a safe, supportive and inclusive work and learning environment. To empower students and strengthen their sense of belonging, Bachewich established a variety of community groups including one related to the Seven Sacred Teachings where students explore each teaching, identify practical ways to put them into practice and promote them throughout the schools. Recognizing the power of community connections, she enables students' participation in the Leda Lake Development Project, the community garden, the Royal Canadian Legion Days, the Rolling River First Nation powwows and other events. Understanding the impacts of colonization and the residential school system, Bachewich is a champion for reconciliation in her schools and throughout the division, fostering strong relationships with the local First Nations communities, inviting elders to share their teachings and providing training and mentorship to other principals. Bachewich exemplifies exceptional educational leadership.