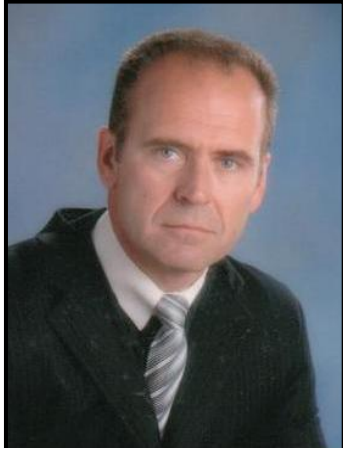




RIELITY CHECK

A publication of the Louis Riel Teachers' Association (www.lrta.ca)

June 2015



**Congratulations!
Have a Wonderful
Summer!**

As always, June is a time for reflection.

Being President of our Association has once again been an enriching and fulfilling experience for me. This year has been eventful, hectic, demanding and always very, very rewarding. I believe in the importance of the work members do and the importance of supporting members in their work!

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE President – Frank Restall

Looking back, it is hard to believe we have accomplished so much in such a short period of time. From before the students arrived last September through the end of this month, the Association has been very active. This is evident by the Association's establishment of a variety of different committees and the numerous meetings that occurred to give voice to the concerns of members over the year.

One group that needs special mention is made up of those members who contributed to the new Collective Agreement that was signed last month. Bargaining meetings began some three years ago and the culmination of all the time invested was the Ratification Vote which occurred near the end of April.

Our current contract expires in 2018 and while work has already started for the next round of bargaining, it is currently each and every member's responsibility to police the Collective Agreement to ensure that member rights are never infringed upon.

In the area of member wellness and recognition several functions occurred. The Louis Riel Social was a great success along with the New Member Celebration in September and the LRTA Retirement Reception in mid-June. Thank you to all who assisted in planning the events and to members who participated. The strength of our Association is indeed the active involvement of our membership.

THIS MONTH'S ISSUE:

P. 1-3 President's Message

P. 3-4 Collective Bargaining – Next Year

P. 5 MTS Reflective Professional Practice Grants – by Matthew Steingart

P. 6-8 Ann Walker's Retirement Reception Remarks – June 11, 2014

President's Message (con't)

In areas of governance, the LRTA's AGA and the MTS's AGM were resounding successes for the Association. LRTA is identified as a leader in the provincial arena as we strive to best represent our members and to ensure the collaborative strength of the Society. I also know the entire LRTA membership joins me in congratulating James Bedford who was elected as the Vice-President of the Manitoba Teachers' Society. The Society is very fortunate to have such an experienced, dedicated and industrious Vice-President working on behalf of the 15 000 members of the province. The LRTA will certainly miss James' leadership and experience at the local level but the Association is very pleased that James will now be able to advocate on behalf of all Society members and be a strong voice provincially for public education.

Congratulations, James!



In addition to governance, the Association strived to advocate for members on an individual basis and to provide support to all members whenever the need arose. While different individuals played important roles at different times over this past year, the successes of the Association can be attributed to the collective efforts of the entire membership. Therefore, some well deserved words of appreciation are in order.

I would first like to thank all the members of the LRTA for the excellent work you have done for your students and your colleagues this past year. The work you do is so important! We prepare for the future today and it is an incredible undertaking. Please take time to look over the positive events of the past year and celebrate them.

LRTA Council Representatives, who represent the members of the LRTA, have once again done a great job this year. So much of the Association's work requires Council's participation as it allows the LRTA to advocate for members and to keep our colleagues throughout Louis Riel informed. Council Representatives are vital links to our members and participation at our Council meetings is always strong. Simply put, the LRTA is recognized as having the best Council in the province!

LRTA Executive members are colleagues who put their names forward to be elected at our Annual General Assembly. They assume duties to ensure that the on-going needs of the Association are met. Our entire Executive took on additional responsibilities when asked to make sure that Association activities served the members. The Executive is the administrative body of the Association and Executive members are constantly advocating for members. The efforts of the Executive are appreciated by all and I am confident that our new members to Executive will only build upon our sterling record of advocacy!

Thank you so very much!

I would like to thank members of the Council and Executive for all of their efforts and support on behalf of colleagues this year. As well, thank you to the LRTA members who fulfilled roles at the provincial level. Enjoy some well deserved rest and relaxation this summer.

Retirees, congratulations and best wishes for happiness and health as you close one chapter of your life and venture on your next journey. Your contributions have greatly impacted the lives of the students you worked with.



President's Message (con't)

New members, it has been many months since the LRTA New Member Celebration and I am certain your year has flown by. Thank you for your energy, your ideas and your commitment. Now take some time in the summer to catch your breath!



Thanks also to the Trustees and the Superintendent's Team for their collaboration on issues that were significant to members. The channels of communication are always open and accessible.



C'est mon privilège et mon plaisir de servir comme votre président. Merci pour votre participation, votre encouragement et votre appui de l'association.

It is my privilege, honour and pleasure to serve as your President. Thank you for your participation, your encouragement and your steadfast support of the Association!

In the last few days of this year, take care of yourself and take care of each other.

Have a safe summer!

Collective Bargaining – Next Year

VP Collective Bargaining – James Bedford

There have been a number of questions raised about what the Collective Bargaining Chair of LRTA does when we have concluded negotiations for one Collective Agreement and are not yet required to begin negotiations on the next one. I can assure you that life will be busy for next year's Bargaining Chair.

From our last round of negotiations, two committees must be formed. The first is to discuss non-contact time with respect to the proposals that we presented as part of our opening package for the now concluded negotiations. Central components of those proposals were the length of the school day in high schools and prep time blocks in elementary schools. The second committee is to discuss clinician working conditions, again with respect to the proposals introduced in our opening package.

It is practice that the Collective Bargaining Chair plays an integral role in selecting the members to sit on these two separate committees, and chairs both committees from the LRTA side. The President shall sit as an ex-officio member, but the leadership of the committees will fall onto the shoulders of Bargaining Chair. It is expected that both these committees will meet regularly and they must report on June 20, 2016, so meetings will run the duration of the year.



Secondly, there is a new Collective Agreement (CA) in place. As with any new CA, there is an educational component. We are looking forward to the implementation of Team Leaders in schools, the second Discretionary Day at no cost, our new Family Medical Leave clause, new language defining workplace harassment, and, although not included as an article but flowing from negotiations, **the promise of report card writing time for every member in every school.** Our policies define this work as “policing the Collective Agreement.” I much prefer the language of “facilitating the implementation of a new Collective Agreement.” However you wish to define it, changing existing language and adding new clauses always results in a learning curve for everyone involved, and the Bargaining Chair takes the point position for the Association on the Collective Agreement.

Thirdly, next year’s Bargaining Chair will likely have to build a series of relationships with both the School Division and the MTS. We are expecting some changes in staffing at MTS through retirements, and it is quite realistic that LRTA might experience a change in our staff support. The Bargaining Chair and the assigned Staff Officer who supports us must establish an excellent working relationship. As with all of our professional relationships, these take time to build.

Fourthly, the Bargaining Chair has always assisted the President with personnel matters. Without going into details, issues affecting the well being of individual members are critically important to us and represent a significant investment of time throughout the year.

Fifthly, even though we have successfully concluded our negotiations, over half of our fellow Associations are still at the table. It is the responsibility of the Bargaining Chair to monitor all Collective Agreements as they are settled and make comparisons to our agreement. You may not be aware that language and working conditions can vary from CA to CA. The LRTA Bargaining Chair is expected to act in the best interests of the membership, and to do this he/she must be knowledgeable of what is going on elsewhere. Given the length of our current CA, the Bargaining Chair has an onerous responsibility to keep abreast of developments.

Lastly, looking towards the future, 2016/17 will be a “survey” year for the membership. This will require the creation of a strong Bargaining Committee in 2015/16 to begin laying the groundwork for that survey. I would expect that, as technology evolves, the Bargaining Committee will be taking a hard look not only at what we ask the membership, but also at how we ask it. The survey lays the groundwork to develop an opening package in the 2017/18 year so we are ready to begin the cycle anew in the spring of 2018.



I believe that it is always a good thing to have high expectations of your Association Officers. I hope that the items above give you the confidence that your interests are being looked after. I trust that it also creates interest in getting involved with one of the many opportunities that presents itself, whether it be one of the committees specific to next year, or the Bargaining Committee. One of the strengths of this Association has always been, and remains the involvement of all members in what we do. A Bargaining Committee in particular can only be successful if representation comes from across the membership. Please watch for announcements in the fall if you are interested in getting involved, and please continue to be involved.



MTS Reflective Professional Practice Grants - by Matthew Steingart



The Manitoba Teacher's Society distributes grants to teachers called Reflective Professional Practice Grants. These grants focus on projects related to innovations in the classroom, such as social relationships in schools or equity and diversity issues. The Digital Citizenship Committee at Dakota Collegiate wished to study the use and impact of Social Media for the 1200 students in our high school. What sites or programs were they using, and how and what students were using them for? Our goal was to build awareness and use these tools in a safe, responsible manner. While we have used this grant to collect data for the past three years, our goals for the project are not yet complete.

The committee polled students from a variety of grades, socio-economic, and cultural backgrounds. Committee members guided small group discussions over a series of lunch hour meetings. From these closer interactions, we determined students were not always able to manage their social media footprint responsibly, and often lacked the strategies to do so. Apps like Snapchat and AskFM were of particular concern, with their ability for users to hide in relative anonymity. These apps particularly appealed to students. Other times, students were unaware of the implications and impacts of how online words affected the real-world interactions in school.

The committee concluded there is a clear need to provide educational additional resources to students, parents and staff. A logical location for this would be on the school division portal and school portals. This would include the strategies and tools to safely manage social media accounts, and how to effectively scrub their social media footprint as students approach graduation and begin their careers in the world of work. As well, it would include a FAQ-style webpage answering the most pressing concerns students in crisis may have related to online interactions. We will continue to meet and discuss different strategies and resources to support our students, staff and parents as we grapple with the constant evolution of social media and digital citizenship.

Reminders: If you have recently changed your personal information such as name and or address, please contact the LRTA office at (204) 929-5782 and have them update your information.

Each year, the LRTA is very pleased to host a reception for our members who have made the decision to retire. At the reception, a member of the retiring “class” is asked to speak on behalf of his/her retiring colleagues and to reflect upon past experiences with an eye for the future. The result is always heart warming and inspirational. The following is the speech from last year’s valedictorian, Ann Walker. As we approach the end of this school year, I am sure that all LRTA members will especially appreciate and value Ann’s remarks.



Ann Walker’s LRTA Retirement Reception Remarks - June 11, 2014

Good afternoon everyone. Thank you to the LRTA for hosting this reception and giving us the opportunity to celebrate with friends and family. I would also like to thank the Board of Trustees for a wonderful evening at the Fort Garry last week and for the gift.

To the retirement class of 2014: Congratulations on your successful careers which cover a wide range of roles: elementary, middle and senior years’ teachers, student services teachers, divisional coordinators, and administration. We have had different journeys getting here but we have some common experience that binds us together. I hope to touch on that common experience this evening - but the stories are my own so I invite you to reflect and substitute your own details in your own mind.

Almost a century ago Will Rodgers said: “If you want to be successful, it’s just this simple. Know what you are doing. Love what you are doing. And believe in what you are doing.” Know what you are doing involves following best practices, supported by research and honed by personal experience. Think back to the beginning of your journey: why did you become an educator? Some of you may have been inspired by a wonderful teacher, or liked to play school at home with your friends. I started in education because I loved science, but I stayed because I love children. Reflect back on the beginnings of your careers when you were still diamonds in the rough and consider what it was like to be a newly mined and unpolished teacher fresh out of school in your first position.

I remember my first day, in a school just outside of Winnipeg, waiting nervously at my classroom door for my first bona fide students to arrive. I had convinced the divisional hiring team that I could do the job but there was some measure of doubt in my own mind. So, I asked the teacher at the doorway to the classroom opposite for advice to have a good start. Since I had put him on the spot, he said he didn’t know but that he had heard somewhere that teachers shouldn’t smile until Christmas. So, I thought about that and pondered whether or not I considered it to be a good strategy until my first student arrived. I automatically beamed a huge smile and quickly realised that the advice did not work for me and I was going to have to find my own way and build on my strengths and preferences and what worked for me.

Over the years we have learned a lot but the more you learn, the more you realise what you don’t know. We are fortunate to work in a division that values professional development and we have benefited from the

generosity of the hundreds of individuals and teams who have shared their wisdom as we listened to others, went to workshops, joined PLNs, attended conferences, took University courses such as reading, backwards design, assessment, the brain and learning, sensory diets and responsive classrooms. However, teachers talking to teachers is still the best PD and we learn from each other every day. So, thanks to our colleagues, both divisional and external, for their professional support and encouragement along the way. We assimilated what made sense to us as we developed our own repertoire of best practices.

What I learned about teaching also helped me be a better parent: but what I learned about parenting helped me be a better teacher – thanks to my kids for being great guinea pigs! And thanks for keeping me somewhat up to date in fashion trends, reminding me what's important and how to use the latest technology – including the remote control!

At the Faculty of Education back in the early 1990's I took courses on technology in which we learned useful information regarding the differences between a floppy disc and a hard drive, things that are now obsolete – and I'm sure you can all add to the list. We have seen huge developments in technology from the Gestetner to photocopiers, having computers on our desks, using email for the first time, Videodisks, Grade book and Mastergrade, Outlook, iPads and laptops and now Lync and the new phone system. Surely that's proof enough that we're lifelong learners. We might not be experts at everything technology has to offer, but, we have discovered that if we need to know something in class about technology, we can just ask our students to demonstrate.

Teaching has evolved over the years from the model where all information needs to go through the teacher: like an hourglass where the sand (information) has to travel through the narrowing of the glass (the teacher). Current teaching is more like a sandbox model, where children play freely, explore and make their own constructions in the sandbox and the teacher makes sure they play nice, the sand stays in the box and that the students have the criteria to demonstrate the objectives of the exploration effectively. (Not my own analogy)

Yes, things have changed over the years but I hope you, like me, always loved what you were doing. And the main reason for me is because our job is about people. Teaching is about developing relationships and the beauty of it is, as you develop a relationship with someone, they develop one with you and enrich your life: it's a win-win situation. We also have relationships with their families that can last for years as each successive child takes turns in our care.

And it's a gift that keeps on giving – we often meet former students in the community and listen to them proudly tell their stories. Some have even become colleagues in the school division or you may have had their children in your class. However, I've been told that when grandchildren of former students start to appear in your class it might be time for new adventures.

I admit I also love the start of the school year: the planning and organising that goes along with teaching. Like many teachers – I loved getting school supplies and having all the bright new pencils sharpened at the start of the year. I always tried to get on the annual trip to Office Depot for their special Teacher Appreciation Day and the free bag of goodies. Which brings me to the fact that teachers like to get things for free, or get a bargain, because teachers are incredibly generous, not only with their time but with their cash. They spend hundreds of dollars of their own money on providing supplies or treats for students, be it pens, pencils, paper, a share of their lunch or snack or even coats in the winter. Teachers take care of kids.

The start of every school year also brings the promise of a new beginning – a fresh start; a refreshed passion to connect with kids by keeping learning relevant, interesting, and meeting diverse learning needs. To light fires rather than fill buckets (Yeats). To create a culture of inclusion, respect, embracing of differences, kindness; to find new ways to engage students and stimulate learning.

And I love the times when you can actually see the thinking processes going on inside a child's head – the wheels turning so to speak: times when you know you have changed someone's brain forever - and how do you know? By the words "Oh, now I get it!" or "Ahh, now it makes sense!" Those moments are priceless.

We believe in what we are doing but we probably have different beliefs so again I encourage you to reflect on your own. I believe that education is the great equaliser: it is the route by which people are set free, be it from ignorance, poverty, oppression or from our mistakes. We are fortunate to live in Canada. By teaching in the public education system we contribute to the strength of our democracy and consequently our community. I also believe our mandate as educators is to unleash and nurture the power and potential of the individual so that each and every child can make sense of the world in their own way, make their own journey in life to be happy and fulfilled and contribute to their community.

It takes a village to raise a child and I, like others here today, am proud to say mine were raised in the St. Vital / LRSD village. Thanks to all staff: the teachers, educational assistants, clerical, custodians, board office, clinicians and consultants for taking care of our kids.

Our families also helped us through our journey. Thanks to our children for teaching us what's important and how to use the remote. Thanks to our partners who provided an impartial and confidential sounding board for all the times we anguished about not being able to reach a child or the system that did not treat him/her fairly. Thanks for putting up with the boxes of lessons in the basement just in case we ever needed to teach that course on using a slide rule. Thanks for helping to collect toilet rolls and plastic yogurt containers for class projects. Thanks for donating gently used outerwear for students in need. Thanks for being so supportive through report card writing periods when we might have been just a little bit grumpy.

Teaching keeps you young and the evidence is here tonight. Teachers touch the future and your legacy continues in the students you taught in our community. You made the world a better place one student at a time. Good luck and good health for a wonderful retirement full of new opportunities. Continue to practice the secrets of success into your retirement. "Know what you are doing. Love what you are doing. And believe in what you are doing".

Ann Walker

