

REALITY CHECK-IN

APRIL 2020



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Marcela Cabezas

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Sure, I anticipated a few run-of-the-mill challenges in my first year as Association President. But leading members through a global pandemic? Yeah, nope. Wasn't on my radar. Not even a little bit. Suffice it to say the days following Friday the 13th when the Province initially announced the impending school suspension were hectic and out of the ordinary to say the least.

On March 31st, in the middle of spring break, Premier Brian Pallister and Education Minister Kelvin Goertzen announced the indefinite suspension of classes in our province. In his closing statements, Premier Pallister thanked frontline teachers for stepping up. He said that during these times of great challenge there exists a time of great opportunity. He went on to state that, "new methods and mechanisms that work are going to be discovered and we're going to find a *better* way to teach and a *better* way to affect a child's learning experience as a consequence of these challenges."

I have been a teacher for nearly seventeen years now and there is one thing I know to be true: there exists no better way to teach students than to be face to face with our learners. Constructing and strengthening trusting relationships with our students is done best in our classrooms. Learning thrives when all of our learners are presented with equal access and equal opportunity in our schools and communities. Our new business delivery model enshrines none of these tenets and further marginalizes our most vulnerable. I am ever hopeful that these better ways will come about when it is once again safe to return to our schools and after we have had time to reflect upon what we hold most valuable in our society: people.

Nevertheless, we shall persist. We will work through these challenging times, propelling ourselves towards new technology, new applications, and new programs under the most challenging of conditions. We will do this because of our love for our students and desire to do the very best we can for them despite the circumstances. We will sacrifice pieces of ourselves in attempting to do things we never imagined, things we know to be more than we can handle at the best of times, when it is business as usual.

As educators, we are taught to put the kids first, sometimes at our own peril. I will remind you that this is not business as usual and in the case of an emergency you always need to put your oxygen mask on first before you are able to safely assist others.

During the break, I read an excellent article by academic and author Aisha S. Ahmad, entitled "Why You Should Ignore All That Coronavirus-Inspired Productivity Pressure." I encourage you to examine the article to take from it what you will.

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-You-Should-Ignore-All-That/248366>

For me, some of her key takeaways included:

1. The importance of establishing security for yourself in this new reality. First, "Focus on food, family, friends and maybe fitness." Be sure to build a social safety net for yourself.
2. Once secure, a mental shift to adjust to this new normal will gradually transpire. Don't rush the process, rather let humility and patience be your guide.
3. Embrace the new normal by creating new routine and structure for your time. Recognize that this situation is a marathon. "Understand that if you sprint at the beginning, you will vomit on your shoes by the end of the month."

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CONTACT US

**Due to
COVID-19, the
LRTA Office is
now closed.**

**President and
Vice-Presidents
are continuing
to serve
members
remotely.**

**LRTA OFFICE
204-929-5782
Messages will be
checked daily.**

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**All matters will be dealt
with in confidence.**

**Manitoba Teachers' Society
To Request Staff Officer
Assistance 204-888-7961**



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CONTINUED

It is often said that we teachers are creatures of habit. We are used to sprinting from the Tuesday following Labour Day straight to June 30th where we cross the finish line arms raised sometimes with a sense of elation and victory only to collapse on the track. We lay there completely winded and motionless for a moment to take stock of the race we just ran to learn and prepare for the next one to come in two months time.

This change in routine is an opportunity for us to re-program and re-invent ourselves. This could mean re-examining our schedule to finally incorporate time for self-care that we previously never adequately prioritized. For some, it might mean discovering hidden talents, acquiring new skills, learning new languages, or researching topics of inquiry that have long sat on your wish list. Take advantage of the time to collaborate on those projects that have long sat on your "To Do Someday" list when you've adjusted to the new normal. And be sure to find ways to laugh often. All in due time. No rush, I insist.

In closing, I want to share an important lesson taught to me by my mother while she was on her cancer journey. She emphasized the importance of practicing gratitude, especially in the most difficult of times. Right now, it's easy to focus on all the things that are absent and have disappeared from our daily routine. I invite you to be present and alter your perspective to take stock of what we do have. For all of us, I hope health figures highly upon your list.

We are fortunate to live in this technological era that permits us to stay connected while respecting social distancing protocols. So, as Aisha Ahmad said, create your security net: reach out and keep in touch! Now more than ever, it is critical that we take care of ourselves and take care of our teams. Each one of you is part of our team. Never forget, your Association is here to support you.

Wishing you all good health and happiness,

Marcela

LRTA AGA 2020 UPDATE

The LRTA Annual General Assembly (AGA) scheduled for Wednesday, April 22, 2020 cannot be held at the Louis Riel Arts and Technology Centre this year due to public gathering health orders.

The Manitoba Teachers' Society Provincial Executive has approved a temporary suspension of some provisions of Local bylaw and constitutional requirements pertaining to the Annual General Assembly.

As such, Associations such as ours have been directed to conduct our AGA by electronic means and to hold online voting for budget and membership fees. The LRTA is awaiting clarification from the MTS with respect to the mechanisms by which we are to perform this.

Further information is anticipated shortly and will be shared with members via LRTA Council Representatives as soon as it becomes available.

Thank you to all LRTA members who continue to support the important operations of your Association.

ADVICE TO MTS MEMBERS ON WORKING FROM HOME



The Manitoba Teachers' Society advises members to adhere to the following principles while working from home:

Your first responsibility is to your students, so ensure that you are fulfilling your obligations by providing meaningful learning opportunities for students to experience/explore while learning from home.

- Continue to adhere to and maintain professional boundaries with students and parents while teaching and communicating via electronic methods. This should include communicating only during daytime hours and limiting the volume of communication to a reasonable level.
- Continue to be responsible to make an ongoing effort to improve professionally. We encourage members to incorporate professional development activities during your day such as reading professional learning materials, listening to podcasts, watching relevant pedagogical or instructional media materials or even connecting via the various electronic media with colleagues.
- Continue to conduct all of your interactions with students, peers and the public with consideration and good faith. Be mindful of your use of social media. The use of social media is widely in the public eye and this domain is subject to a wide range of perspectives and opinions. Public monitoring and commentary can create unintended consequences.
- Members should remain at home and continue to follow the advice of public health officials during this important time of the COVID-19 crisis. Please pay attention to the advice regarding social distancing and limit human interactions outside of your home. The government has taken very serious and drastic steps to suspend classes so that we can all do our part to slow the spread of COVID-19.
- Check [here](#) for regular updates on COVID-19 for MTS members.

A reminder that the Manitoba Teachers' Society [Code of Professional Practice](#) still applies while you work from home.

My thanks to all our members for their extraordinary dedication during this uncertain time. We are truly in this together.

Roland Stankevicius
General Secretary, MTS

RESILIENCE IS A SUPER-POWER

Resilience can be defined as *advancing despite adversity*. This seems appropriate in the uncertain reality of COVID-19. Many people experience anxiety about the unknown, and the media can be both a help and a hindrance to managing stress.

Consider the following tips and links for building resilience as we advance despite this adversity:

Keep a positive outlook. Focus on the good things in your life rather than worrying about things you may not be able to control. This means acknowledging your own strength, resourcefulness and abilities. This will help you avoid seeing the pandemic as an insurmountable crisis.

Manage what is within your control such as [proper hand washing](#), cough and cold hygiene, and self-care.

Stay Informed with reliable sources such as [Manitoba Health](#).

Keep calm by surrounding yourself with people who are level-headed and not reactive. Avoid people who trigger you to ramp up your worries or reading about the pandemic before sleeping.

Develop realistic goals by having a plan and focusing on specific tasks that will help you move forward. By keeping yourself busy, your mind will be occupied, having less time to dwell on worries and fears.

Complete something. Anything. When we cannot control our circumstances, self-efficacy suffers. This can lead to feelings of helplessness. While you self-isolate, complete smaller projects/tasks that you can pace. Bring the feelings of mastery into your “new normal”.

Plan ahead. Is there something you could work ahead on? Prepare a daily or weekly plan and chunk projects into tasks. Gather materials you will need for the next while.

Manage your worries. Intense worrying about what might happen or how the situation with ill family members might get worse can trigger our body’s automatic “fight-flight” stress response. Over time, this physical response to stress takes its toll on our bodies. Consider finding effective ways of managing stress, such as:

1. **Quarantine the worry.** Create a regular half hour each day as “worry time” to identify and tackle each worry as if it were a problem to solve. When you feel yourself slipping into a worried frame of mind, try to postpone the feelings and focus instead on what is actually happening at that moment. Read this: [How to Manage Anxiety During the COVID-19 Outbreak.](#)
2. **Find a quiet place each day where you can write down your worries and fears undisturbed.** Sometimes by articulating your worries, it is easier to find solutions or simply deal with them.
3. **Breathe.** Use mindful breathing techniques when you are feeling overwhelmed. Check out [Stop Breathe Think](#) or [Calm](#) or [Insight Timer](#).
4. **Learn from your past.** Think back to experiences and sources of personal strength that helped you through other crisis situations. How did you respond? Who did you turn to for support? How did you overcome the situation? What did you learn that would be helpful in this situation?
5. **Stay connected.** The fear of infection and the desire to protect yourself and your family from COVID-19 may mean avoiding social situations and increased isolation, but maintaining [healthy connections](#) is important. Use phone, social media, email, video apps, and text. Consider joining an online book club.
6. **Keep physically fit.** During a pandemic, you may not be able to enjoy your usual level of physical activity; however, it’s important to exercise your body, stretch out tense muscles, eat a healthy diet and get enough sleep. By taking care of yourself, you’ll be better prepared to deal with situations that require resilience. Check out these [free or discounted at-home workouts](#). You can also download four free classes from [Modo Yoga International](#).
7. **Seek help.** If intense anxiety is preventing you from performing your job or other daily activities, consider contacting support services through your extended health benefits.
8. **Reach out.** Don’t forget to reach out to people who are especially isolated such as the elderly or immune compromised.
9. **Lean in to joy.** Whether this is with music, film, reading, art, walking, observing birds, podcasts, comedy, singing, blogging, or crafting, do these things when you have the time. Improvise. Build these into your daily routine.
10. **Donate blood.** Canadian Blood Services is also in need of donations – see their website for information on [donating during COVID-19](#).
11. **Use Manitoba Shared Health Resources.** If you are concerned that you or a family member is sick, use the [COVID-19 Screening Tool](#) in order to determine if you should contact Health Links – Info Santé (204-788-8200 or toll-free at 1-888-315-9257) or seek other medical advice.

