



General Byng School

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December 13, 2023

Hello General Byng Families,

General Byng School's motto is 'Strength in Community' and we stand behind our values of kindness, respect, and responsibility. Now more than ever, it is important for us as a school and family community to support our students as they navigate a world where they are bombarded with language, images, and actions of hate from around the world, and unfortunately (at times) close to home. The goal of this letter is to inform you about what we are experiencing at school and to inform you of the work we are already doing, what we continue to do and what we will be implementing moving forward.

As a school community we have been working to structure our 2023-2024 school plan around our motto and values by creating program leader positions and staff teams in themes of **Belonging and Connection** as well as **Equity and Inclusion**.

Since September, we have put in place a new house program that focuses on placing students from Kindergarten to Grade 9 in ten (10) coloured house groups, replacing our past practice of four (4) house groups. Our hope is that this will provide staff and students more opportunity to build positive connections. Our Belonging and Connection Staff Team, led by Robyn Chase, created a half day event where groups met, created a house team chant and flag, and rotated through activities based on friendship, empathy, and connection. The day was a success and saw older students blossom in leadership with our younger students and had staff and students cultivating positive connections. We will continue this work throughout the year.

Our Equity and Inclusion Program Leader, Abbey Cluett, is working with a diverse group of students to create a cultural room that will host activities throughout the year as well as offer a safe space for students to connect and celebrate cultures of others. Her role also involves planning and co-teaching with all teachers to provide students with learning opportunities that open minds to new cultures and perspectives while cultivating respect for others.

Early Years teachers are creating experiences such as activity rotations once a month to build connections across grade levels and have integrated classroom lessons that support our values. We are also fortunate to have one of our divisional support teachers working in our 3/4E and 4/5K classes alongside our teachers. Over the past couple of months 4/5K has created a class Folklorama and in 3/4E the students have been learning about feelings and emotions. They learned managing techniques as well as coping strategies to regulate Big Emotions (Anger, Anxiety and Sadness). They learned that we all experience feelings and emotions every day. Learning when and why they show up can help us make friends, stay safe, motivate us, and give us confidence.

In Middle Years we are experiencing what many Pembina Trails middle years schools and schools across the province and country are seeing: use of hate language. At General Byng, we are interrupting these moments and using them as an opportunity to listen, ask questions, and to educate our students on the impact of words. Our teachers have been establishing and re-establishing classroom norms around what the space looks, feels, and sounds like. This has

provided common language and expectations across all classrooms. We are providing opportunities for students to engage with guest speakers and partake in workshops that address hate speech and the impact of the words on those around you. We are hosting a speaker and workshop series in the afternoon on Monday, December 18th for the Grade 7-9 classes with dynamic speakers from Winnipeg. Expect another email tomorrow (December 13) highlighting the workshops and speakers.

Despite all the work we are doing in individual classrooms and across the school, we know that having a partnership with families is a key component in ensuring our students are well-rounded citizens who feel seen, heard, and safe in school and in the community.

General Byng would like to offer parent sessions on some of these topics in the new year, so stay tuned for how you can be involved. Mr. Gerbrandt and I are always available to meet and discuss ideas/questions/concerns you may have.

We have an amazing community at General Byng and our students continue to make us proud! In sharing this information today, we hope to wrap around our students to ensure they are critical thinkers who understand and believe in our motto 'Strength in Community' and who instill the values of kindness and respect in all they do – that is the responsibility of us all!

So, keep up the great work General Byng and let's spend the time before winter break celebrating each other so we can continue to make a difference in 2024 and beyond!

Sincerely,



Tracey Groening
Principal



Darren Gerbrandt
Vice Principal