

**MANITOBA'S EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION
AWARDS RECIPIENTS 2023-2024**

Teaching Excellence Award: Saul Correia, Collège Churchill High School, Winnipeg School Division

As an educator for over 20 years, Correia has consistently demonstrated an unwavering commitment to excellence in education, ensuring students engage in rich and meaningful learning that support the development of both hard and soft skills.

Correia has transformed his Grade 7 to 12 woodworking program into a dynamic and inclusive learning environment where all students, including those with exceptional needs, can thrive. By applying Universal Design for Learning principles, he intertwines the development of practical skills and theoretical knowledge of woodworking with the learning of complex mathematical concepts, resulting in more competent mathematicians and woodworkers.

Correia fosters a sense of autonomy among students and encourages a proactive and self-directed approach to learning through the use of QR codes on machines that link to safety guidelines, instructional videos and other relevant information. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Correia adapted the program by creating scale model kits that allowed students to continue to engage in safe, hands-on woodworking projects from home.

In partnership with northern communities, his students built and donated dog houses to provide essential shelters for animals, fostering a sense of community engagement and empathy in students. As a coach of numerous sports, Correia instills in students the values of teamwork, perseverance and sportsmanship that go beyond athletics and contribute to a positive and respectful school culture.

Teaching Excellence Award: Miroslawa Demko, Ralph Brown School, Winnipeg School Division

As a Grade 1, 2, and 3 classroom teacher, Demko is well-versed in differentiating instruction to meet a wide range of student needs. Her students are immersed in inquiry-based learning that nurtures collaborative communication and investigation to draw on their curiosity and strengthen critical thinking. For instance, buckets of soil samples in the classroom resulted in the study of underground creatures and the development of a compost program at the school.

In addition to being heavily involved in Ukrainian family events at her English-Ukrainian bilingual school, Demko celebrates all student cultures and beliefs by including, for example, Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in her teaching.

To increase student engagement, she started a before-school coding club, provides special student leadership opportunities and co-ordinates a school and community garden initiative. Demko, an exceptional yet humble teacher, is an inspiration to colleagues as she puts heart and soul into creating an environment for wonder and discovery where students feel safe, excited and empowered.

Teaching Excellence Award: Tara Tuchscherer, St. James Collegiate, St. James-Assiniboia School Division

Tuchscherer's contributions to the St. James Collegiate community over the past 20 years have made a lasting and positive impact. She is a driving force in shaping an inclusive school culture where students feel valued and empowered to make valuable contributions to the entire school community.

As a humanities teacher, Tuchscherer's thoughtful and engaging teaching style makes learning highly relevant and compelling. Students are supported to achieve their best outcomes and personal self-growth. The result is made evident by the numerous student-led initiatives, many receiving special recognition such as the Manitoba Indigenous Youth Achievement awards and the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation's Outstanding Take Action Project awards.

With boundless energy and passion, Tuchscherer co-ordinates and obtains funding for many school-wide initiatives in the areas of human rights, sustainability, literacy and Indigenous allyship. She also develops monthly lessons focusing on truth and reconciliation for her colleagues to incorporate into their teaching. Under her leadership, engagement opportunities are plenty – from the EcoJimmies and Culturally United student groups to Indigenous and Women's Day events. Her influence reaches further through her role in making St. James Collegiate Winnipeg's first Fair Trade School in 2017.

Outstanding New Teacher Award: Rachel Robinson, Victor Mager School, Louis Riel School Division

Currently while only in her second year of teaching, Robinson has distinguished herself as an exceptionally caring, engaging and enthusiastic new teacher. She effortlessly builds rapport with her students while incorporating creative and interactive lessons and projects that capture their interests.

In her Grade 5 and 6 classroom, she builds students' sense of belonging, independence and generosity by using the Circle of Courage model. Students make use of numeracy and literacy groups and the class's "affirmation station." She engages her students through outdoor learning workshops, science, technology, engineering, art and design, and math (STEAM) challenges and presentations by guest speakers.

Robinson builds a positive school culture through initiatives such as the Community Helpers, a student advocacy group that responds to needs in the school while providing leadership opportunities. These helpers assist with organizing meals-to-go, a school-wide spirit week, a student newsletter, bulletin boards as well as eco-friendly activities. These initiatives foster ingenuity, develop compassion and build communication and collaboration skills.

Robinson also set up a Grade 6 skating program, for which she consulted with various organizations, solicited equipment donations and obtained grant funding to pay for ice rentals and transportation. With a strong commitment to her profession and the school community, Robinson has demonstrated the qualities of an outstanding new teacher.

Outstanding School Leader Award: Karen Duffield, Shamrock School, Louis Riel School Division

Duffield began as principal in 2022 at Shamrock School which at the time was merging with Grade 5 and 6 students and staff from a nearby overpopulated school. Understanding the impacts of this change on school culture, Duffield prioritized cultivating a sense of belonging and ensured the entire school community felt heard, valued and supported. With a clear vision and a calm, friendly disposition, she built a strong foundation of trust and safety by introducing professional development for staff to promote equity, diversity and inclusion. Her leadership helped the school navigate through incidents of discrimination among students through difficult yet meaningful conversations with families.

Duffield also established a student group that now encourages and empowers students to take risks by starting various initiatives to create positive changes among their peers and community. Under her leadership, there has been a positive shift in staff morale and employee collaboration, making Shamrock a welcoming place. Despite the magnitude of her responsibilities, she cultivates relationships with students, families and staff, which has led to her successful transformation of the school culture.

Premier's Award for Excellence in Education: Rebecca Okemow, Strathclair Community School, Park West School Division

Okemow brings a holistic approach to enhancing the educational success and well-being of all learners as a Grade 9 to 12 guidance counsellor and teacher in a school with a predominantly Indigenous student population. As a Cree woman, she is not only an invaluable role model and resource to the school community, but also inspires students to succeed despite the intergenerational impact of residential schools and the effects of personal trauma.

She has taught a variety of courses, from social studies to Spanish, and she uses various strategies and cross-disciplinary assignments to accommodate different learning styles. Okemow developed four student-initiated courses focusing on Anishinaabe identity through language and land-based learning, while learning Anishinaabemowin herself.

Her love of the outdoors has led her to organize fishing and kayaking trips, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing excursions, and she coaches a successful basketball program. Okemow helps students see their potential after high school by ensuring that graduating students have the resources and connections they need post-graduation.

Okemow promotes and supports Indigenous perspectives within and beyond the school. She gives presentations to community organizations and pre-service teachers. She is a catalyst teacher for treaty education, an active member of her division's Indigenous Education Committee and a contributing member of Manitoba Teacher's Society's Indigenous Voice and Action Standing Committee. Okemow's strong expertise combined with her gentle leadership and dedication inspires many students and the colleagues she works with.