



Fort McMurray Public Schools adopts SACS

In January, the board of trustees of Fort McMurray Public Schools committed itself to a long-term Safe and Caring Schools initiative. The following article, which appeared in the district's newsletter Applevine and is reprinted here with the district's permission, describes how different schools are responding to this initiative.

The ATA's Safe and Caring Schools (SACS) project is more than a program to be implemented in classrooms, say the two district administrators who have been trained to inservice other staff.

"It is not a program. It is a school philosophy. It is a culture," says Thickwood Heights principal Paula Hanson.

"The most important aspect of the safe and caring project is that it becomes part of your teaching. You can use these attitudes in all subjects," adds Westview vice-principal Deb Jahrig.

SACS integrates prosocial and conflict resolution skills into the existing program of studies from kindergarten to grade 6. The program is divided into five topics.

Each topic addresses knowledge, skill and attitudes across the curriculum. The five topics are

1. building a safe and caring classroom
2. developing self-esteem
3. respecting diversity and preventing prejudice
4. managing anger and dealing with bullying
5. working it out together.

SACS is meant to be implemented throughout the

schools. Each topic is expected to take two months, during which time students from kindergarten to grade 6 will practice the same skills. School-wide activities related to the theme



Photo by Carl Patzel, *Fort McMurray Today*

Niska (aka, John Waddell, superintendent of Fort McMurray Public Schools) performs the Niska Dance with students from Thickwood Heights School.

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Parents, schools can work together to stop bullying



Studies show that about 15 percent of all students—one in seven—are involved in some level of violence either as a bully or a victim.

Students who are the victims of bullying are more likely to drop out of school than others. They are also more likely to have a drop in grades. Schools and parents can and must work together to solve the problem of bullying. Here are some suggestions from the National School Safety Center:

- **Parents and educators** must work together to develop rules governing student behavior. They need to let students know that adults are in charge and will not allow any student to hurt any other student.
- **Schools should send a survey** to students *and* parents asking about bullying. Many times, students who are victims do not tell an adult.
- **Schools should set up** a comprehensive reporting system that keeps track of the details of all bullying incidents including names, locations, times and other circumstances. This can be helpful in planning ways to avoid repeating the bullying.
- **Schools need to believe** parents when they report that their child is being bullied. Schools must provide support and, if necessary, protection for victims. If schools fail to help victims, it only encourages bullies to make further assaults and reinforces the concern of victims to keep silent.

Source: *What's Working in Parent Involvement* 8, no. 5 (March 1998).

Tips for teaching respect and responsibility

While most educators believe parents are the primary moral teachers of their children, others argue that it is the school's job. The reason? Changes in the traditional family.

In *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*, Thomas Lickona asserts that schools should teach universal principles that are agreed on by parents *and* society at large. He describes six elements that add to such a climate:

- **Moral and academic** leadership from the principal.
- **School discipline that models**, promotes and upholds the school's values.
- **A school-wide sense of** community.
- **Student government that** involves students in democratic self-government and fosters the feeling, "This is our school, and we're responsible for making it the best school it can be."
- **A moral climate of mutual** respect, fairness and cooperation that pervades all relationships—those among the students, those among the adults in the school and those between adults and students.
- **An emphasis on** the importance of morality by spending school time on moral concerns.

Source: *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*, (Bantam Books, 2451 S Wolf Rd., Des Plaines, IL 60018, 414/786-6500 ext 9479), 478pp, \$22.50.

School violence

In 1998, *Who's Who Among American High School Students* found that peer pressure (31 percent) was the biggest factor affecting the level of violence in schools—up steadily from 17.5 percent in 1995.

Source: *Who's Who Among American High School Students*.

Best practices: St Paul School

A school mural

In response to the tragic events that took place in one of our southern Alberta schools and the Safe and Caring Schools project, the staff at St Paul School decided to construct a mural. The home and school council was approached to help the staff with the project. They were excited to support this project and have designated some of their funds to finance materials for our mural.

Also, some local businesses donated tiles.

The mural is being constructed as a mosaic and will be erected in the front entrance of the school. The mural will be dedicated to the students of St Paul School. Staff members who wish to help with this mural have been invited to participate: some have been part of the planning, others have been drawing and constructing and still others have been helping with the gluing of the tiles.

The drawing was born after discussion and reflection with the mural committee. In response to the Safe and Caring theme, it was thought that



an image of Jesus with children reflected the concept that we, at St Paul School, would like to portray to our children. This image was what we felt expressed the heart and soul of a “safe and caring” school.

The drawing that emerged was one of Jesus reaching out to a child, who, in turn, reaches out in trust and safety to Jesus. The child in the

drawing represents each and every child in our school. The child with outstretched arms reached out to Jesus in whom he/she trusts, and when embraced by Jesus, who is Love, he/she feels safe and cared for. Jesus entrusts each and every person in our school to embrace each child with

open arms, love and acceptance. It is through and in Jesus that we create a safe and caring school.

The development of the mosaic has been documented in working stages on our Web site at www.holyspirit.ab.ca/st.paul.

Polly Positive

As a staff, we decided to focus on the positive behaviors of our students. We started by teaching the Safe and Caring curriculum. Then we introduced “Polly Positive,” who acknowledges students who are conducting themselves in safe and caring ways both in the school and on the playground. When a student or adult notices a student performing safe and caring actions, the student’s name and the

action are posted on the bulletin board in the entrance of the school. All the students whose names are posted have their names announced by Polly Positive over the PA system. Polly Positive encourages the students to continue their safe and caring behaviors. This project has shown “positive” results at St Paul School (K-3).

If your school has a SACS “best practice” to share with other schools, please submit an article and photograph, if possible, to Koni Macdonald, Safe and Caring Schools Project, The Alberta Teachers’ Association, 11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton, Alberta, T5N 2R1, email: <kmacdonald@teachers.ab.ca>.

may be organized. Deb says a strength of SACS is that it is not just meant for implementation by the school. There is a community aspect to the program.

“If the community is not modeling the behavior, it is going to be evident in the community,” Paula says. “Schools can’t do it all.” To date, Paula and Deb have trained staff at Westview, Timberlea and Thickwood Heights. Training is scheduled for Greely Road staff during the professional development day in March.

Now that the elementary program is in place, the ATA has begun to develop a secondary component. The grade 7-12 program will integrate safe and caring basic principles found in the elementary program across the curriculum with content that is appropriate for secondary students.

Two staff each from the high schools attended a secondary train the trainer inservice in February and may train high school staff later this year.

Chinese proverb

If there is light in the soul,
There will be beauty in the person.
If there is beauty in the person,
There will be harmony in the house.
If there is harmony in the house,
There will be order in the nation.
If there is order in the nation,
There will be peace in the world.

—Submitted by Elana Simington, Art/Drama Consultant,
Edmonton Catholic Schools

Niska News is a newsletter produced by the ATA's Safe and Caring Schools (SACS) project for school and community members. The goal of the SACS project is to encourage practices that model and reinforce socially responsible and respectful behaviors so that learning and teaching can take place in a safe and caring environment. Achieving this goal requires the involvement of not just parents and teachers but also all the important adults in a young person's life. This newsletter is designed to provide timely, up-to-date information about the project. For more information, contact the SACS office by phoning 447-9487 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-232-7208 (from elsewhere in Alberta). Copying and distributing Niska News is permitted as long as the source is credited.

Notices

The **ATA Educational Trust** is inviting Alberta educators to submit project proposals for the 2000/2001 school year in five areas: behavior concerns, literacy, heritage, technology and global education. The area of behavior concerns includes the reduction of violence in schools. Each year, the trust awards project grants from \$400 to \$2,500 to help educators develop, through research, teaching resources that will be of practical value in the classroom. The deadline for proposals is May 1, 2000. Additional information is available from the ATA's Web site at <www.teachers.ab.ca/services/trust.html>.

Networking Youth Nationally (NYN) is a youth-driven organization that strives to link youth, youth groups and youth friendly professionals to promote open communication on youth mental health issues. The network focuses on the themes of increased acceptance, communication, partnership and advocacy. Additional information on the network is available from NYN's Web site at <www.nyn.on.ca>.

The **Search Institute** will hold its next Health Communities • Healthy Youth Conference November 2-4, 2000, at the Minneapolis Hilton and Convention Center. The institute is an independent, nonprofit, nonsectarian organization whose mission is to advance the well-being of adolescents and children by generating knowledge and promoting its application. Additional information on the conference is available from the institute's Web site at <www.search-institute.org/hchy/2000conf.html#round>.