

MECCS

A newsletter for Mother Earth's Children's Charter School to share its successful traditional and innovative programming.

Mother Earth's Children's Charter School
Box 42, Site 2, RR 1
Warburg, AB T0C 2T0

780-702-7531 school office
780-232-4481 family liaison

Principal Erin Danforth - edanforth@meccs.org
Family Liaison Janet House - jhouse@meccs.org

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Partnership with Academy at King Edward

The partnership between MECCS and the Academy at King Edward started in 2017. Since then, students from both schools have gotten together to take part in field trips and cultural infusion days.

MECCS is the only Indigenous charter school in Canada. It serves Cree and Stoney students from the Treaty 6 area. The school believes there are four needs that must be met for every child to be able to succeed.

Every child feels the need

- for belonging (I mean something to you)
- for mastery (I am good at something)
- for independence (I have power to make decisions)
- for generosity (I have a purpose in life)

With the support of adults who care and believe in their potential, youth can discover their hidden talents, develop personal responsibility and find a purpose to their lives. Many of



MECCS and Academy at King Edward partnership in action: Blair Brertton, Gavin Adams and Bereket Reich learning together.



Teacher Nyles Varughese welcomes MECCS students to the Academy at King Edward.



Anne Sophie and Rinzin Bird line up to get a slice of pizza from Nyles Varughese during a lunch break at the Academy at King Edward.



Students from both MECCS and the Academy at King Edward gather to listen to author David Bouchard.



Berlin Anderson, Elijah House-Alexis and Sam Krebs collaborate on a learning opportunity.



Bereket Reich, Lazura Roan, Krrish Lavelle and Blair Bretton during the cultural exchange day at the Academy at King Edward in Edmonton.



Working and learning together: Tenzin Bird, Rylan Duquette and Gavin Adams join Nyles Varughese to work on a cultural exchange partnership project.



Krrish Lavelle tells his story to author David Bouchard during a visit to the Academy at King Edward.



David Bouchard listens intently as Lazura Roan shares his own original story with the author.



Lydia Ochuschayoo and Sophie Eyo.



Anne Sophie, Ella Day and Rinzin Bird.

the children MECCS serves face some form of adversity. Resilience is the innate human ability to rebound from adversity with even greater strength to face future obstacles. Research has shown that resilience is the norm for kids. This means that it is never too late to make a difference. As our traditions teach us, we must nurture the development and educate the whole child as was given to us by the Creator. The philosophy and foundation of our school community and program is based on traditional Indigenous teachings of the medicine wheel passed down from our Elders.

The Academy at King Edward is one school with three different locations. It has a very multicultural student population. The school's first community is in beautiful Strathcona, situated at the top of Edmonton's river valley on the south side of the North Saskatchewan River. This site offers programming for students in

grades 2 to 9; it is also the AKE site with which MECCS is partnering. Their second site is at Victoria School of the Arts, where Academy students in grades 10 to 12 are offered programming. Their newly opened third site is at McNally High School. This is also a site where students in grades 10 to 12 are offered programming. Even though the Academy has three separate sites, it is very much one school. The Academy at King Edward was established in 1992 as a segregated site for students who met district criteria for Learning Strategies. The Academy provides specialized programming in a safe, secure atmosphere that is designed to meet the academic, social-emotional and classroom learning skill needs of the students.

For the 2017-18 term, MECCS teacher Maxine Hildebrandt and Academy at King Edward teacher Nyles Varughese received a project grant from the Canadian

Multicultural Education Foundation and the Alberta Teachers' Association for their Promoting Understanding Through a Cultural Exchange Partnership.

Students from both schools took part in a penpal opportunity that started this January. They wrote letters to introduce themselves to each other and share information with their fellow students. They told each other their names, ages and grades, and added details about favourite hobbies and school subjects, friends and family, future ambitions and their respective schools.

The students also created "All About Me" posters, which were exchanged between the two schools. These posters

were placed in a visible place, such as a hallway or bulletin board, so that the students could get to know their counterpart exchange students by name and picture. They learned that other students shared interests similar to their own, which helped to foster positive relationships.

As part of this partnership, the Academy at King Edward will host a cultural day. MECCS students will travel to the Strathcona site, and all students will take part in traditional Indigenous games, an animal identification station and other activities that promote collaboration, perseverance and friendship.

Another part of this partnership will involve MECCS teacher Maxine Hildebrandt visiting the Academy at King Edward to teach junior high students how to make bannock.

Each time students or staff visited one of the partnering schools, students practised good leadership and communication skills to be open and welcoming hosts.

Throughout the partnership, students have created and maintained a portfolio or scrapbook containing correspondence, pictures, drawings or journal entries reflecting on their experiences in the cultural exchange. They learned how to recognize the format of a friendly letter as they wrote to their penpals. They also made the connection between a variety of subject areas, including language arts (speaking, writing, communicating), science, social studies, art and drama.



Partners in education: Academy at King Edward teacher Nyles Varughese and MECCS teacher Maxine Hildebrandt.



New pals (left to right): Krrish Lavelle and Lazura Roan, Elijah House-Alexis and Berlin Anderson, Elizabeth Presley and Olivia Paul.



Clockwise from above: Naveen Benipal, teacher Alina Engstrom and Olivia Paul; teacher Mark Lindsay joins students at lunch; Dorian Haliburton with the AKE bus driver; Rylan Duquette, Krrish Lavelle and Tenzin Bird explore math games; teachers Naomi Ethier and Mark Lindsay with Mark's son; teachers Mark Lindsay and Nyles Varughese with Daniel Bruyere and Tristan Cardinal; teacher Maureen Munsterman with Riley Sheppard and Kendra Affolder.



The highlight of the partnership took place when the students visited each other in April for two intense workshop days with Métis author David Bouchard. David's books formed the backbone of the literacy portion of the partnership; students in both schools read a series of his books and worked on projects based on them.

David has a long-term relationship with MECCS, which originated several years ago as a result of the over 20-year personal and professional relationship he shares with Superintendent Ed Wittchen.

An acclaimed author of children's books, David is also a champion of literacy. This former teacher and school principal has written more than 60 books in English and French. Many of them combine poetry, prose and visual arts. They explore topics such as the environment, history, and the traditions and cultures of Indigenous communities in Canada. A storyteller and sought-after public speaker, David has travelled across the country to promote the importance and joy of reading and writing. He was named to the Order of Canada in 2010.

David visited the Academy at King Edward earlier in the year as an introductory activity. He then spent a day at each school in April as a culmination of the project. Students from both schools took part in these literacy-intense days.

Perhaps the best event of the partnership so far was when the penpals did a workshop with David and wrote poems about animals in the style of David's books. It demonstrated how the students truly understood the cultural issues David had brought to their attention.



Right, top: Selfie time with David Bouchard.

Right, middle: Constable Bailey Young joins David and students.

Right, bottom: Janet House prepares a traditional meal of stew and bannock in the MECCS kitchen.

Below: Brennan Adams, Adam Bull, Ruby Ellis and Bereket Reich participate in math games.

