

MECCS

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

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Celebrating Our Strong School Partnerships

We recently celebrated another year of building partnerships with other schools to share our cultural learnings. They in turn share their cultural knowledge with our students.

Wildwood School, under Lisl Gunderman's leadership, has partnered with MECCS teacher Maxine Hildebrandt for three years. This partnership culminated in Maxine and Lisl receiving the prestigious Governor General's Award for Excellence in History Teaching this past year.

The Academy at King Edward School in Edmonton, under the leadership of Nyles Varughese, has also worked with Maxine's class for the last three years. The highlight of this year's partnerships was being invited to Academy at King Edward to use the Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada Giant Floor Map, as it was one of the first schools in the Edmonton area to have access to the map.

This year, a new partner school was added when Suzuki Charter School, under the leadership of principal Karen Spencer and teachers Melissa Kujundzic and Nisha Minhas, joined the group partnership.

Former MECCS student Storm Mackinaw performing during the school celebration.





David Bouchard with the Wildwood School group.

Building relationships between the schools and between students is key to the partnerships. For example, for the students from all three schools to learn Métis jigging for this celebration, Maxine arranged for noted Métis dancer Hugo Martell to lead them in a workshop, with Suzuki students playing the Métis fiddle songs on their violins. Maxine and her students also led cultural workshops at the other schools during the year.

We also celebrated our long-term partnership with author David Bouchard. In 2009, David was named as a Member of the Order of Canada “for his contributions as an author of children’s books and an advocate who has championed the cause of reading and writing, and who has shared his pride as a member of the Métis community through his stories.”

David’s stories are the driving force behind Maxine’s elementary literacy program. Everything from reading to storytelling, from music to math revolves around the David Bouchard books that Maxine introduces to her students. The year-long projects finish up with David’s annual visit to the school to share his stories.

The long-term partnership between MECCS and David Bouchard arose from a friendship and working relationship between him and our superintendent Ed Wittchen that goes back more than 20 years. David first worked with MECCS students 10 years ago. His close connection to the school really started five years ago when Maxine started using his books as the focus point of her literacy teaching and then developing the school partnerships using our cultural teachings.



David with the students from Suzuki Charter School.

Last summer when she started planning this special celebration day, Maxine and her husband Mark went to Victoria to visit David and his wife Vicki. When she managed to get Vicki aside without David, Maxine convinced her to fly out to surprise David on this special day.

Later in the winter, Maxine also convinced David’s good friend and flute maker Steve Rensink to join them and be part of the surprise.

When the day arrived, David thought he was doing his usual storytelling session with Maxine’s class, which kept him occupied while the other schools, our students, many parents and special guests gathered in the gym without him suspecting anything.

As the grade 3/4 class brought David to the gym, it became evident that the surprise had indeed worked judging by David’s reaction to the gathering and then by the look on his face when Vicki and Steve walked out from their hiding place. The students then took over, and for a change David got to sit back and enjoy the performance from the three cultural partnership schools.

The Wildwood School presentation opened with a scene of a pioneer farmer walking behind a horse-drawn plow, which represented the Ukrainian and rural heritage of the Wildwood area. Narrator Phallon Cartwright played the part of Natalia, who told the story of her ancestors:

My ancestors were Ukrainian. That man behind that horse-drawn plow is how I imagine my great-grandfather Walter Nevichnaya. He came to Alberta, then known as



Clockwise from top left:
 1. Wildwood's Dawson and Deacon Raymond.
 2. Makayla Morrison and Jordan Riehl (horse) and Hayden Pudio (farmer).
 3. Phallon Cartwright and Lisl Gunderman.
 4. Lisl with Oleksandr Danyleiko, the Consul General of Ukraine, and Andrew Boitchenko.



the North West Territories, because of a promise from the government that he could buy 160 acres of land for \$10 if he cleared it within three years. He did.

I loved my Baba too. When I am missing her, I go to the carved wooden box that she gave to me. Everything in Baba's special carved wooden box helps me remember her stories.

Look at this picture of my Baba. She always wore a special headscarf. She called it her babushka.

Look at these precious Ukrainian Easter eggs. These ones are wooden but my Baba taught me how to decorate traditional Easter eggs, and someday I want to teach my own kids how to make them.

This is my Baba's blouse from when she was a girl.

Part of their growing up was to learn the traditional Ukrainian folk dances from the old country. Baba always told me that some of her happiest childhood memories were of their joyful and lively dancing at weddings and after church. She called the dancing a swirling whirlwind of colour.

Next, Andrew Boitchenko had his Wildwood students demonstrate Ukrainian folk dancing.

MECCS students Adrianna Bull and Raquel Oar then represented a Métis child and Nohkom (grandmother) while Alayah Lagrelle and Sierra L'Hirondelle narrated:

*Nohkom:
 Noshishim,
 Soon it will be time to sing and dance
 You'll learn to jig, you will have the chance.*



Top, left to right: Steve Rensink and Vicki Bouchard hiding to surprise David; David is surprised; Mark Hildebrandt offering tech support. Bottom, left to right: Maxine Hildebrandt receives a flute as a gift from Steve Rensink; David playing his own flute, which was also gifted from Steve; David posing with Lisl Gunderman and Darrell Hunter.



*Uncle will teach you to move your feet
Fast, yet lightly along with the beat.*

*Fast fiddles, dancing, all of the fun
Good food and visits with everyone
We'll laugh, tell stories, play fiddle tunes.*

*Child:
Oh Nohkom!
I can almost hear the music now
From deep inside I feel it somehow.
With you and Moshom I do belong
In my Métis culture I am strong.*

*Listen Nohkom, can you hear?
The fiddle music—it sounds quite near...
The music sounds are not far away
It is time for us to dance and play!*

This is when the MECCS students who had learned to jig demonstrated the Red River Jig. They were followed by four Suzuki students who played a Métis folk song they had learned.

Next, Teanna Paskemin played a First Nations child and Brisa Lewis played her grandmother. Their characters appeared talking in the forest while narrators Emma Yellowbird and Jaina LaFleche-Arcand told their story:

*Child:
Nohkom!
I'm so excited for the powwow
Did you know that I can dance fancy now?
My momma made me a brand new shawl
My jingle dress is way too small*

*Nohkom:
Come, my child*



Clockwise, left to right:
 1. Brisa Lewis and Teanna Paskemin representing a First Nations grandmother and child.

2. Adrianna Bull and Raquelle Oar representing a Métis child and grandmother.

3. Jalen Paskemin and Darcy Paul drumming as representatives of the Blackstone drum group.

4. Shawna Bird and Lily Bird with Kookum Theresa Bird.



*Step into the outer circle
 Listen to the beating drum.
 Take my hand and hold it tight
 The thing you seek is soon to come.*

*Everybody's smiling because
 Our hearts all beat as one,
 Listen to the drum—it calls
 The magic's here—it has begun...*

Some of our current students as well as former student and champion dancer Storm Mackinaw then demonstrated various forms of First Nations dancing, including fancy, shawl, jingle, grass and traditional styles.

Gatherings called powwows with dance and drumming competitions are held across North America. The outfits

are correctly called regalia, not costumes. Each of them has been created by hand with incredible detail. Many of them have been passed down through generations of families. The colours and designs have special significance for each dance.

We are fortunate to have Terry Paskemin as a parent in the school. He leads the internationally recognized drum group Blackstone. Blackstone began performing and competing across North America in the late 1980s, and have made more than 20 recordings of their powwow and round dance songs. Terry comes in to our school on a regular basis to teach our young men drumming.

Jalen Paskemin, who is in grade 9 at our school, and Darcy Paul represented Blackstone at this special celebration as they played for our dancers and again



*Clockwise from above:
1. Students from the Suzuki Charter School playing a Métis fiddling tune on their violins.*

2. David Bouchard talking to the grade 3/4 students about his collection of flutes.

3. The beautiful display created for the celebration lunch by Maxine Hildebrandt. Maxine has many talents in addition to her teaching skills.

4. Const. Young, who always shows up on special days at the school, sits with a few students during this recent school partnerships celebration.

5. Everyone joining the round dance.



during the concluding round dance, when most people attending the celebration joined in.

This special day concluded with lunch for everyone and starting our plans for next year's partnership activities.

