



SEVEN OAKS  
SCHOOL DIVISION  
*community begins here*

# Community

B E G I N S H E R E

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Welcome to Elwick Community School where life and learning are combined to recognize the individual student and their place in their community. Starting the day off right with a breakfast program open to all students and ending the day with constructive, creative, and safe opportunities for youth activities in the evening – Elwick truly has a community focus.

“Through our leadership and buddy programs that ‘mix’ the age groups in the school we are helping our students see themselves as part of a larger community,” explains Principal Pat Plohman. “People don’t learn in isolation. We have a culture of being a ‘community of learners,’ incorporating the academic and the social and character development of children.”

Participation in a Community School Partnership initiative is a natural evolution for the school. With a grant from the provincial government to support the initiative, Elwick will be looking at ways to enhance the school and the community’s efforts to share space and resources and overcome barriers to participation in the school and community decision-making.

“We will hire a ‘Community Connector’ to identify existing assets and partnerships in our community,” Mrs. Plohman says, “and then look at where we need to strengthen them and around what issues, for example safety.”

The project’s ultimate goal is to have Elwick become the ‘hub’ of community activity. It’s a realistic goal, given the school’s already active role in non-academic programming. Elwick accommodates after-school programs including “Edge” (Extended Days Growth Education) offering different learning experiences, “Keeping Balance” for Aboriginal awareness and activities for youth, and MAYAC (Maples Youth Activities), an activity program for girls on Tuesday nights and co-ed on Saturday nights.

## Getting their just desserts

About three years ago, Elwick’s music teacher, Erin Risbey, introduced the “Dessert Theatre” for middle school students. As families and teachers were entertained by the middle years’ drama/choir students, other middle years’ students served them dessert and beverages. Not only were the audience members appreciative of the concept, it has resulted in a considerable shift in attitude about taking music which is an option in grades 6 – 8.

“I now have many more students taking music,” Ms Risbey says. “From about 30 students three years ago, there now are from 60 to 80 enrolled.”

This increase in participation lets Ms Risbey reach more students to develop confidence, pride in accomplishment, listening, and concentration skills through the disciplines of music and drama. The choir, Ms Risbey comments, is another way for students to express themselves and find a creative outlet.

## Early intervention PROMOTES LITERACY

Reaching students before they even are enrolled at the school has become a mission for Elwick School. Its Early Intervention in Literacy Program helps pre-schoolers and their families develop literacy, learning, and social skills.

“Strong early years literacy is an important part of our community school initiative,” says Lorelei Bunkowsky, Vice-Principal.

Pre-schoolers who participate are entering school with a stronger foundation for learning while their parents are gaining access to resources and information on a variety of issues, for example, nutrition. A multi-disciplinary team, including Speech and Language and support staff, help run the program.

Since it started five years ago, the number of families participating in the program have increased considerably, from an initial trickle to enough that the community coordinator offers programs twice a week. The literacy program for pre-schoolers and parents is run out of the Village Centre, an off-site building that actually helps increase the linkages between the school and the community.

The PACT program also run as an eight-week program that provides a nutritious lunch and a parent education component. The latter is facilitated by all staff and specialized teachers including music, gym, and pre-school program staff.

“We are seeing a significant shift in what young students are learning compared to before the program was running,” Ms Bunkowsky adds. “The teachers of grades 3 and 4, who have students who went through the program, can see a difference in the abilities and literacy skills.”

## INQUIRING MINDS

Students in grade 7/8 teacher Jennifer McGowan's classroom are discovering that inquiring minds learn! Using the "Inquiry" approach to teaching, Ms McGowan has her students learn through discovery, what she calls 'real learning.' Their current project, studying a nation of their choice, is a good example.

The students can present any information they want about their chosen country in the form of a brochure. Prior to that, they have to read at least one fiction and one factual piece. They also have to research at least 30 facts about their country.

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"The students end up remembering the information more than if I just tell them about it," Ms McGowan says.

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Ms McGowan has adopted the Inquiry approach for language arts, having students write book reviews instead of reports and posting the reviews in the library. One result has been the frequent borrowing of these books by other students in the school. Similarly, the students will display their country projects for others to view, adding an element of pride to their work.

Inquiry originated as an elementary school approach that Ms McGowan and others have studied and adapted for middle years.

## A little TLC goes a *Long Way*



At Elwick, TLC stands for Teaching and Learning to Care. Valery Czarnecki and Candace Propp, together with the school psychologist and social worker, have implemented TLC in the K to 2 grades to help the younger students learn the basics of empathy and 'emotional literacy.' TLC is based on three rules: 1) stick together; 2) no hurts; and 3) have fun. The fourth unwritten rule is that an adult is always in charge.

"We wanted to help young students learn to get along better and learn to take care of each other," Ms Czarnecki says. "They learn the language of caring and the practice of better social skills."

Since TLC was introduced four years ago, teachers and parents are finding students get along better and are better at problem solving. TLC has introduced a 'moral' growth component to the overall learning environment at Elwick, enhancing its mandate to help teach both students about academics and social development.



## CONGRATULATIONS to SOSD Assistant Superintendent Edie Wilde

We are delighted to announce the recognition of Edie Wilde, Seven Oaks School Division Assistant Superintendent, as Superintendent of the Year. A leader in the field of Inclusive Education, Wilde has been in her present position since 1998, working to help make Seven Oaks School Division a model for inclusion in the province and in Canada.

As former President of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, she made the education of aboriginal children a priority, resulting in a provincial conference, "Sharing Visions, Creating Futures," that sparked a renewed dialogue among educators in the province.

Wilde also led Seven Oaks in establishing an innovative school community partnership, the "Village Centre," which helps the community access an array of health and family services. "The challenge for educators is to define what we believe about education in a manner that encompasses the values of a democratic society, and at the same time provides equity of opportunity for all," Wilde said in her acceptance speech.

It is the fifth year CASA has recognized exemplary work done by superintendents across Canada with the EXL award sponsored by Xerox Corporation and the second year the recipient was from Manitoba. Two years ago Roy Seidler of Seine River School Division received the award.

Representing Canada and CASA, Wilde will be honoured in San Diego in February at the annual convention of the American Association of School Administrators.

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