



SEVEN OAKS
SCHOOL DIVISION
community begins here

Community

B E G I N S H E R E

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Skate or Swim?

Community Connections Enable Students to Learn Both

The Seven Oaks School Division is doing its part to help prepare students to enjoy the wonderful world of water (and ice), through the **Learn to Swim** and **Learn to Skate** programs.

The programs have a lot in common besides water. Both involve activities that are fairly inexpensive and accessible. Both are in keeping with Manitoba's Healthy Schools Initiative which includes a specific focus on encouraging physical activity. Both build stronger connections between schools and the community facilities that partner to make the programs possible.

Most importantly, the programs give students the opportunity to build their skills in activities they can do virtually their entire lives – and that they can share with friends and family.

Making a Splash with Learn to Swim

Learn to Swim focuses primarily on the over 800 Grade Four students in the Division (though there is sometimes overlap between grades and in the ages of Special Needs students). Classes are generally 45 minutes long, held three mornings each week in fall, winter and spring so each school has its own day at the pool.

One of the pools used in the program is the Seven Oaks Pool, a City of Winnipeg facility. At the Seven Oaks

Pool, Program Coordinator, Sheri Thompson works with Alison Hall from the Division Board Office to plan the program each year.

On their first day, students are assessed by pool staff to determine their swimming levels, then separated into groups according to their abilities. Students at the Seven Oaks Pool are taught according to the Red Cross 'Learn to Swim' Program as well as the Lifesaving Society's Swim Patrol and the Bronze Medal Family Award Programs. With ten Red Cross levels, students have the opportunity to build their swimming skills whether they've never been in the water before or have been swimming for years.

"My instructors love to see the children's progress," says Sheri. "For example, a child that starts in Level 1 is usually afraid to put their face in the water. By the end of the session, the same children are jumping in the pool, going under water and having so much fun!"

The Benefits of Swimming

"I think sometimes there will be issues that prevent some children from having the opportunity to swim," says Alison Hall, when asked of the benefits of having the Division provide such programs. "This gives them an early



exposure to swimming that benefits them from a safety standpoint while encouraging them to swim because it's fun."

Barbara Cerilli, Vice Principal at Victory School (which goes to the Seven Oaks Pool for Learn to Swim) certainly appreciates the safety aspect of Learn to Swim: 10 of her 43 student swimmers had never had any formal swimming instruction before. But she also sees an excitement that follows students right back into their classrooms.

"Teachers are always looking to have their students share stories and the swimming pool experiences are a rich and fun learning adventure for all to share," she says. "You can just see the excitement through the lively chatter and smiles on their faces when its swim day!"

Over at the pool, Sheri sees that enthusiasm transform from physical activity, into positive choices. "Our efforts aid in the prevention of risk factors such as abuse, drugs and obesity," she says. "It is my opinion that every little bit helps, and if one child benefits from our program, then it is very worthwhile."

It's Great to Skate

Unlike Learn to Swim, Learn to Skate is an entirely new program, launched this year as a way to give students another option for physical activity.

"Skating is an inexpensive activity that people can enjoy in our Manitoba winters," says Sandee Deck, Divisional Teacher Team Leader, Physical Education. "There are lots of places to skate for free in the outdoors and there are free public skating times available at many of the indoor rinks."

The program – the only one of its kind among Manitoba's school Divisions – is off to a flying start. Over 400 students took classes in November and December and over 500 more are signed up for January/February/March. Classes run between 30 - 40 minutes (depending on

ice times and transportation) and focus on providing kids with all the basics of skating.

"The instructors focus on basic skating skills - standing (balance and body position), gliding, stopping and even how to fall and get up," explains Sandee. "Then they quickly move to more advanced skills. The focus is on having fun while they are learning, so they will continue to develop their skills and a love of skating."

The Spirit of Skating

As with the Learn to Swim Program, community is a big part of what makes Learn to Skate possible.

There's the vital support of the West Kildonan and Maples Arenas which have both been fantastic, working with the Division to coordinate all the classes and making certain everyone gets enough ice time. Over 100 leadership students from the Division volunteer their time to help their younger peers through their first strides and spills. Plenty of parents also come out to lend a hand or just to cheer the kids on as they learn.



One more important community aspect is the donation of equipment. While the Division purchased some second-hand skates and received hockey bags full of equipment from KidSport, it's been donations made by Division residents that have allowed so many students to get involved. And with plans to expand the program to even more schools next year, that continued commitment is needed.

"We've been working on trying to have enough equipment at both rinks," says Sandee. "Right now we are still transporting stuff back and forth. We need close to 100 pair of skates and 60 helmets per location."

Perhaps the best thing about Learn to Skate is seeing students so excited about getting out, getting active and learning something new.

Sandee remembers one moment in particular around the holidays. Students had already been skating with Santa (with many asking him for skates at Christmas) and decorated a tree on the ice. One student came up to Sandee and said, "Six more sleeps!"

"I asked her if that was how many days until Christmas," recalls Sandee. "She looked up at me and said, 'No silly! That's how many more days until the next skating!'"

If you have helmets or skates (children's sizes 10 to 13 or adult sizes 1 to 4) that you would like to donate to the program, please contact Sandee Deck at **223-3499** or e-mail at **sandee.deck@7oaks.org**

PUBLIC SKATING AT WEST KILDONAN MEMORIAL INDOOR ARENA

Sundays: 2:30pm - 4:30pm

PUBLIC SKATING AT MAPLES

Wednesdays: 3:30pm - 4:30pm

PUBLIC SWIMMING AT SEVEN OAKS POOL (444 Adsum Drive)

(Facility closed on February 18th, 2008)

Sunday: 10am - 4:00pm
Monday: 1pm - 3:30pm
Tuesday: 1pm - 3:30pm & 7:30pm - 9:00pm
Wednesday: 1pm - 2:30pm
Thursday: 1pm - 3:30pm & 7:30pm - 9:00pm
Friday: 1pm - 3:30pm & 6pm - 9:00pm
Saturday: 12:30pm - 4:00pm

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are home phone numbers

Website: www.7oaks.org

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