

# Division lauded for its approach to mental health

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Louis Riel School Division has been recognized for its work in addressing the social and emotional needs of its students.

The division — which is comprised of 40 schools throughout St. Boniface and St. Vital — received a Heroes of Mental Health award in the organization and business category.

The Canadian Mental Health Association Winnipeg presented the award on Sept. 30.

Nicole Chammartin, executive director of CMHA Winnipeg, said the Louis Riel School Division has sought to better understand the social, emotional and psychological needs of its students, and created a learning framework to better address those needs.

“They really sort of went above and beyond,” she said. “We really need to invest in our kids, in terms of developing their social and emotional skills.”

Terry Borys, the division’s superintendent,

said LRSD was motivated to develop its Social and Emotional Learning Framework, or SELF, following a series of needs assessments with student services teachers in the early 2000s.

A provincial report published in 2005 was a final push for the division, Borys said.

The division partnered with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority’s Mental Health Promotion to develop its framework.

“Kids come to school and we know that there is the reading, writing and arithmetic, but we also know that it’s about much more than that — it’s about helping children learn how to be good citizens, and helping them understand how to contribute to society and become caring

adults,” Borys explained.

Denis Granger, the division’s director of student services, said he’s seen a shift in the education system that has come to recognize social and emotional learning.

“We often assume that all these things come naturally,” he said.

In reality, Granger explained, skills such as building relationships and managing emotions need to be nurtured.

Part of the SELF project includes modifying report cards to make parents aware that social and emotional learning is a priority, Borys said.

“We provide feedback to parents on their children’s personal development as well as their

academic development.”

The division has also integrated the CMHA’s Canadian Mental Health curriculum into its regular health curriculum for Grade 9 and 10 students, while Grade 4 teachers have been trained to provide students with an anxiety prevention program called Friends for Life.

“We’re teaching them to look after their own personal wellness,” Borys said. “And teaching them young.”

He said all indications are that students have taken well to the new classroom initiatives.

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