

NEWS RELEASE

A fierce desire to be the change in Winnipeg

Winnipeg School Division kicks off Everybody has the Right week

Oct. 13, 2015 (Winnipeg, MB) – More than 300 Winnipeg School Division (WSD) students roared in support today as Mayor Brian Bowman issued them a challenge for life:

“I challenge every student in the Winnipeg School Division to find a way to educate yourselves and each other to increase our understanding of diversity; to celebrate the rich cultures of our people, those who are the roots of our city and nation, and those who have chosen Canada as their home,” said Mayor Bowman. “Together we must identify the issues and outline a path to success for all citizens in our journey toward unity and behaving as one Winnipeg – a diverse and inclusive city.”

The Mayor’s challenge, addressed to a student forum at St. John’s High School, helped kick off the WSD *Everybody has the Right* week from Oct. 13 to 16. St. John’s High School Principal Doug Taylor opened the forum, addressing the Mayor’s challenge.

“We need to change perspectives,” said Taylor. “There is a danger of a single story and our responsibility right now is to turn this story around and change the way we all relate.” Taylor reminded students that together we are better, “Our hope is that you, our student leaders, will accept the challenge to make a difference as outlined by our Mayor to open the door on the soul of our city.

In January, student representatives will again meet with Mayor Bowman to share their school’s activities and initiatives toward meeting his challenge toward unity and behaving as one Winnipeg.

“The WSD Board of Trustees is extremely proud of the supports and inclusion found in this division,” said WSD Board of Trustees Vice Chair Sherri Rollins, speaking at the student forum. “We have the largest and most diverse student population in Manitoba – and *Everybody has the Right* is a year-long celebration of our strength in diversity.”

To open the student forum, Aboriginal Language Support Teacher Rudy Okemaw led students in a traditional blessing. Grade 6 to 12 student representatives from schools across the division then took part in an exercise about empathy.

“You can’t teach empathy, acceptance or understanding from a textbook,” said St. John’s High School Vice Principal, Cree Crowchild, who led the activity. “Empathy, acceptance and understanding have to be experienced and nurtured.” Crowchild said the Empathy toy allows all of this to happen, without the participants having to think about treating their partner with acceptance, understanding or empathizing their differences.

The Empathy toy has simple components: slotted wooden blocks that feature a variety of different textured surfaces. Participants are blindfolded. Player one, who holds a completed version of a puzzle, must describe the completed version to player two, who must assemble individual blocks into the same structure.

“Everyone, including Mayor Bowman and Trustee Rollins, participated in the exercise. It’s a very good way to come together as equals,” said Crowchild.

Winnipeg School Division started *Everybody has the Right* in 2014 with a week-long celebration of human rights, diversity and equity to coincide with the opening of the Canadian Museum of Human Rights. The inaugural week was a huge success and WSD has made it part of division-wide programming to celebrate diversity and learn about human rights. In addition, a year-end celebration is being held on May 20, 2016 at The Forks and will feature special artwork created as part of this year’s *Everybody has the Right*.

-30-

Contact information:

Radean Carter

Public Relations Officer

Winnipeg School Division

Phone: 204-789-0412 cell 204-771-5352

rcarter@wsd1.org