

PRAIRIE SPIRIT SCHOOL DIVISION

Nomination for Premier's Board of Education Award
for Innovation and Excellence:

Spirit eLearning School
Offering innovative online education

Prairie Spirit School Division

Prairie Spirit School Division is the learning-centered rural and urban school division surrounding the City of Saskatoon. Prairie Spirit covers a wide geographic area: north to Leask, south to Hanley, east to Colonsay and west to Perdue. The school division includes nine Hutterite colonies and three First Nations communities. Prairie Spirit includes towns, villages and the cities of Warman and Martensville.

The Division's 11,000 students are served by a team of over 1,200 professionals and support staff. Led by our dedicated staff, our students are achieving at high levels and our graduation rates are among the highest in the province.

Prairie Spirit is focusing on preparing students for the world after school, by exploring learning as it relates to a real-world context.

Our mission and vision statements support and reflect the Division's purpose and beliefs about learning. The mission statement captures the spirit of innovation, creativity and a global society.

Vision: Learners for Life

Mission: Learning without limits in a world of possibilities

Board Chair: Bernie Howe

Director of Education: Darryl Bazylak

Division website: www.spiritsd.ca

School website: [Spirit eLearning \(spiritsd.ca\)](http://Spirit eLearning (spiritsd.ca))

Division Twitter account: [@prairiespiritsd](https://twitter.com/prairiespiritsd)

School Twitter account: [@ElearningSpirit](https://twitter.com/ElearningSpirit)

Dedication

This nomination is dedicated to Robert Troupe, an innovative teacher who was an integral leader in the growth and development of Spirit eLearning School and its resources. Rob died tragically in June 2021. Thank you for your dedication and passion for this work, Rob.

Introduction

Prairie Spirit's **Spirit eLearning School (SeLS)** offers an innovative approach to Kindergarten to Grade 12 online instruction. We are providing quality education to students and using creative ways to engage our students. We sit side-by-side and support individual learning needs in our online classes.

Spirit eLearning offers:

- A selection of courses for high school students to receive credits required for graduation.
- A broad range of instruction for K-9 students that provide opportunities to meet the outcomes in the curriculum, create routine, and allow for learning and engagement.
- A team of dedicated teachers that rely on the Saskatchewan Curriculum Guide to plan and create lessons from K-12 that are delivered in an electronic format, delivering content and assignments in a meaningful, engaging and relevant way.

Background

Spirit eLearning was in its infancy for a number of years in the Division, with a primary focus on offering English as Additional Language (EAL) instruction for students throughout the school division. The global pandemic in 2020 led to a dramatic shift for this online school. The growth and development of Spirit eLearning was a response to COVID-19 which presented an opportunity to explore and expand learning in Prairie Spirit.

In the summer of 2020, following over three months of supplemental learning/teaching from home during the pandemic, a group of ten Prairie Spirit educators came together to create teacher supports. Over the course of five weeks, teacher online resources were developed to support all Prairie Spirit teachers. This summer work was the launching pad for building resources for all teachers and for setting the foundation for Spirit eLearning School.

Innovative nature of the program or project

There are a number of online schools in the province. What makes Spirit eLearning School (SeLS) so innovative is the way the school's virtual classrooms mirror typical Prairie Spirit classrooms in terms of daily schedule, routines and expectations.

Classes are structured with synchronous class meetings, with some independent work expected throughout the school day. Our online school is based on live meets and individual structured work time. This allows students to receive real time instructions while also giving the instructor time to check in with students one on one. By maintaining a synchronous structure, educators have been able to create group activities and labs for student participation.

SeLS students have the opportunity to meet in whole class groups, small groups with their peers and in individual one-on-one virtual

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meetings with their teachers. Learning opportunities also include working independently and accessing teacher support, when needed.

Generally, students in Kindergarten through grade 6 have a homeroom teacher. In the grade 7 - 12 classrooms, the teachers are usually specialized in a curricular area, therefore those students experience more teachers in their variety of subject areas. Each class has the same look so that, regardless of the course, students know what to expect and how to navigate.

Individual students gather with their peers as a large classroom group online at regular times during the day. There are also other parts of the day when students may meet online to learn in small groups or one on one with their teacher.

Teachers have been able to build relationships by calling students individually to check in. This gives the opportunity to see the student in real time and ask how they are doing, provide skill questions, etc. Relationships between students have also formed. Students are creating their own group chats or snapchat groups to help each other with class content. Students have stayed connected and made new connections throughout the school division.

Canvas has been added as a learning management system for courses in Grades 10 - 12. Outcomes Based Course development focused on strong pedagogy, [My Prairie Spirit Classroom](#) (MPSC), and assessment. Canvas resources were developed and continue to be developed as we work with teachers and students.

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Canvas works within the goals of MPSC and the strategic framework. It allows for observations, products and conversations that can all be used as evidence of knowing from our students. Teachers and students can be side by side in a digital document; we can construct documents or projects together in shared spaces, and all on a safe platform where a teacher can guide and mentor all these processes.

We are focusing on supporting all Division teachers to use Canvas as a place to “house” their courses, allowing for hybrid learning. This will also support students who are away from the physical classroom for a period time or if they need adaptations to complete their work.

We have strong course offerings which include all core courses for Grades 10 - 12 and many electives. Our courses are rigorous and continue to provide opportunities for students to engage with one another, extend learning outside of the classroom through virtual field trips to places such as Wanuskewin Park, Beaver Creek, farms, gardens, etc.



Students in Biology class get to be a part of a virtual dissection, music classes get to be a part of Resonate music conference, jamming Fridays and other musical opportunities. Classes are also able to collaborate through Teams. An ELA teacher and a history teacher can teach a class together.

The learning opportunities in Spirit eLearning School align with the Division's [Strategic Planning Framework](#) and work toward actualizing [My Prairie Spirit Classroom](#).

Evidence of direct board influence and participation in the innovation

The Prairie Spirit Board of Education strongly supported the creation of a comprehensive online school as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This support was reflected in the budget plan which includes full staffing for this new school.

The Board is committed to supporting students and families through the challenges presented during the pandemic and beyond. The Board supports SeLS as a strategy to ensure all students can access a quality education, regardless of location.

Sustainability of the innovation within the present system or school

Prairie Spirit is committed to supporting Spirit eLearning in terms of staffing, staff supports and professional development. Full-time student enrolment in the online school may depend on a variety of factors, including pandemic restrictions.

SeLS is developing courses that can be offered to students outside the Division, as a strategy to ensure the sustainability of the school. We are very excited to roll out a Distance Learning Program for students outside of Prairie Spirit. We have several opportunities which we believe are highly unique due to our synchronous approach. EAL, Music and Core French will be available to students outside of Prairie Spirit. This is our approach to continuing to develop a strong distance education program which will be recognized province wide.

Client support for the innovation

Student voice:

- I chose online schooling because it allows me to take school at my own pace, and work on what I want to, when I want to.
- As someone who struggles with bad social anxiety, I love SeLS. Being fully online I can focus more on my schooling and marks. While attending in person school I was constantly thinking about what everyone thought about me. Since switching to SELS my marks have gone up drastically and I have made better relationships with my peers and teachers!
- In SeL you have a better connection with the teacher, and I feel like this and the live instruction gave me an overall better understanding of the course itself. The teacher was live, and I could call them or chat during our live class times. That interaction allowed me to ask questions and get an immediate response, and this made for a better learning experience.
- In SEL you have access to all of your content online, so you can't "forget" it at school. You can work on it when you want and the digital format that you can access at all times, which I would have really appreciated in my other school. It's very helpful.

As someone who struggles with bad social anxiety, I love SeLS. Being fully online, I can focus more on my schooling and marks.

Teacher voice:

- At first, I was hesitant about how I could form connections with students online. I try to ensure I call each student once or twice a week to see how they are doing. I've had photos of puppies shared and stories of taking the test to obtain their drivers. I have even had a student message me non-stop to ensure I caught up on the Flash TV series so I could talk to him about it. Students from online are forming connections and hanging out together.
- It's an environment where I feel I can get a chance to talk to each student, even the ones who would be your quiet student in the class and have that opportunity to get to know them.
- Though we may be separated by screens and microphones, forming connections with our students has never been more rewarding
- Our online classroom has a lot of new challenges for both teachers and students to overcome. However, in the past year I have seen amazing student growth and success. The kids who have joined have been able to work through all sorts of unique challenges and develop amazing problem-solving skills.

Though we may be separated by screens and microphones, forming connections with our students has never been more rewarding.

Seeing my students progress, learn, and form connections with myself and their peers has been a fantastic opportunity. There are always new mountains to climb, but we have created unique and special opportunities for each of our students here at SeL.

- We are able to rely on the grown-ups in the home to support our understanding of who the students are and what their next steps should be.
- To have a fully online class is a unique experience that allows for new relationships to be built. If we consider a conventional classroom, educators are easily able to have group discussions or one on one conversations to see how students are doing.

The interesting thing with online is students who may not have felt secure asking questions in real time now have that safety net to ask the teacher privately or with the anonymity of their screen. This has led to new ways of student participation in class such as sharing gifs to communicate emotion and understanding of a topic, or genuinely asking questions to clarify the instruction.

- We were intentional about ensuring students knew they had educators on the other side of the screen who cared and valued them as people and learners. We also wanted to take advantage of the learning opportunity that was having students from all over the division in one classroom – what could be.
- Having the opportunity to switch to teaching online pushed my thinking and the way I delivered my content and instruction. I could not rely on the ways I had always done things and instead had to think about what my students really needed and how I could do that in an online structure. I know that the things I learned and how I structured my teaching this year will change who I am as an educator and learner.
- I found the change to online teaching made me re-examine and enhance all of my teaching practices. You have to really think about the student experience, how things are presented, and how to foster student connection in a technological environment of student isolation. Looking back on a year of online teaching, my goal this year is to create student connection opportunities while encouraging my students to be comfortable in our digital meetings to share, question, and interact with each other.



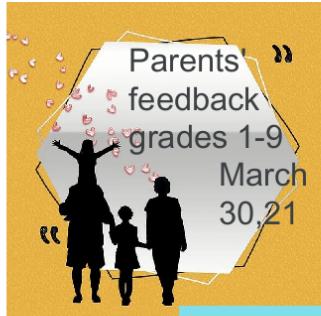
Parent voice:

- This year has been very difficult for many people, and it has been such a relief to have Mrs. Ulliyott as B.'s teacher. She really went above and beyond to make the Christmas concert engaging and enjoyable. The way that she designs the assignments and gives feedback via recorded comments makes it so that Bryn can really own her learning.
- E. is in Grade 2 with Mrs. Jorgenson. She is so kind and smart with how she has designed the course. Her course set up is brilliant! I mean I never would have imagined that my grade 2 child could navigate her own assignments online. She has put together the online classroom in a way that I would have never imagined possible. It is so easy to follow, the visuals are fantastic and

the content on her lessons is phenomenal. I really can't say enough good things about how she has set up grade 2.

- It is really hard in a virtual environment to build relationships, cultivate friendships, and create a platform that encourages engagement. These teachers have successfully accomplished this!

How has online learning impacted your child's learning?



We are way more involved now.

We are much more involved in her learning.

Positive Experience

This has been his best school year yet!

Mental health is better, marks not so much (they were expecting 4's) but independence is better too. Their child loves online learning, very passionate and dedicated to research and learning.

It has made her more confident but also allowed her to goof off a bit more. I think the one on one interaction with teachers, in an online setting, is easier and has benefited her.

It has allowed her to have more one on one help.

I feel my child is getting more one on one support from the home and school connection and that my child is keeping pace with the school and learning new technology skills.

My daughter doesn't listen to me so I get the teacher to help me.

We were nervous about it because of health but it has been amazing and are super happy with the school.

I worry that my child is missing out on the team work and group element of a physical school setting.

He loves online learning! I am scared he will never want to go back to school because he loves it so much!

We needed to adjust the daily schedule to allow more time for my child to work at their own pace.

I feel under qualified to help my child at home.

We are concerned that our child is not interacting with others in online school.

Parent feedback collected in March 2021

Partnerships in support of the innovation

We are very excited to roll out a Distance Learning Program for students outside of Prairie Spirit. We have several opportunities which we believe are highly unique due to our synchronous approach.

English as Additional Language (EAL), Music and Core French will be available to students outside of Prairie Spirit. This is our plan to continue to develop a strong distance education program which will be recognized province wide. These course offerings will be provided in a hybrid approach, with a mix of synchronous and asynchronous participation. This hybrid offering will allow students to take these courses while enrolled in other schools around the province.

Evidence of improved student achievement

Spirit eLearning School has offered quality online education to up to 300 students over the past school year. Without this opportunity during the ongoing pandemic, these students may not have been able to continue their learning and continue to earn high school credits towards graduation.

Supporting resources:

- [Prairie Spirit Strategic Plan](#)
- [Prairie Spirit Annual Report – 2019/20 \(includes ESSP results\)](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [My Prairie Spirit Classroom document](#)
- [My Prairie Spirit Classroom – graphic](#)