



Nomination for Premier's Award
for Innovation and Excellence in Education:

The My Prairie Spirit Classroom (MPSC) document
A shared vision for learning in Prairie Spirit School Division

In Prairie Spirit, our work, our business, our moral imperative is LEARNING. Richardson, 2015, states: "to best help our students become powerful learners in the modern world, they need teachers who are master learners as well." Our core belief is that supporting ongoing adult learning will positively impact student learning and this will result in the actualization of our vision statement: *Learners for Life!*

This commitment to life-long learning is reflected in the statements held within our *My Prairie Spirit Classroom* (MPSC) document. The statements within the document help us answer the questions: *What does learning look like? Sound like? Feel like? What do learners look like? Sound like?*

The *My Prairie Spirit Classroom* document is our anchor chart or learning focus and it provides us with a common language and practice for all of our learning opportunities in our Division. It is a reflection of our core beliefs and commitments in relation to our learners and to learning and is attached to this submission.

The statements in MPSC describe the philosophical underpinnings of best practice or pedagogy for learning. The big ideas of engagement, assessment, rigour, relevance, and relationships are threaded through the statements and provide the foundation for the instructional design of the document. *My Prairie Spirit Classroom* was created to provide the "look fors" for Prairie Spirit teachers and administrators, as we all strive for improved student and adult learning.

Goals of the My Prairie Spirit Classroom document:

- Describe what an optimal learning environment looks like and sounds like
- Align with the Division's learning beliefs and goals
- Provide a guide for sound pedagogy
- Support teachers and administrators to improve student achievement

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 new 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.

Board Chair:	Larry Pavloff
Director of Education:	Lori Jeschke
Vision:	Learners for Life
Mission:	Learning without limits in a world of possibilities

My Prairie Spirit Classroom

We know that the teacher is the most powerful influence on how much a student learns and that teachers can continue to make significant improvements in their practice throughout their entire careers.”
(William, 2011, p.162).

Introduction

As a school division, our most important responsibility is the learning of our students. We have embraced this mission in Prairie Spirit by collaboratively developing system-wide pedagogical learning beliefs and educational practices that include inquiry, discovery, creativity, assessment for learning, relevancy, innovation, risk-taking and communication. These are the skills that will allow our students to be successful, engaged and contributing citizens in our world.

In Prairie Spirit, the characteristics embedded in the *My Prairie Spirit Classroom (MPSC)* document describe an optimal learning environment and reflect our system-side pedagogical learning beliefs. Many of our *classrooms* or learning opportunities are not found within four walls; our *classrooms* are everywhere!

My Prairie Spirit Classroom describes what engagement, rigour, relevance, relationship development, assessment for learning and creativity might look like, sound like and feel like in our many different classrooms.

Background

- The Prairie Spirit Board of Education set out its strategic plan, including learning goals, in 2013. Schools aligned their learning goals with the Board’s goals.
- A foundational belief for all learning goals is that student engagement in their own learning is key.
- Elements necessary for engagement include: relationships, rigour, relevance, and assessment.
- Prairie Spirit further developed the concepts involved in student engagement by creating a document entitled *Targets for Engaged Learning*, which focuses on conferring, side by side learning and feedback that feeds forward learning.
- Based on their work with the *Targets for Engaged Learning*, the Division’s administrators asked for further descriptions of optimal learning environments to provide clear descriptors of what to look for in a classroom.
- The *My Prairie Spirit Classroom* document was developed in response to this request from administrators. This document details our learning philosophy in Prairie Spirit School Division. The draft document was introduced to administrators three years ago. Administrators spent a year unpacking the document during monthly administrator meetings. The following year, administrators were asked to implement the document with their staff. The document continues to serve as our main learning focus in our school division.

An overview of *My Prairie Spirit Classroom*

The *My Prairie Spirit Classroom* document reflects Prairie Spirit’s beliefs about learning for all students and adults. The document captures the big ideas that are foundational to learning. The document has been shared as a career goal or lifelong journey.

The ideas held within MPSC are broad; although the statements appear to stand separately, they are intricately interwoven. One cannot really attempt one area without touching aspects of each of the other statements. Because the document describes a lifetime pursuit, the statements cannot act as a checklist. MPSC is our foundational belief of what learning and learners should look like in our school division.

Big ideas from within the document include:

- Diversity provides first hand experiences from which everyone can learn
- Students learn by talking
- Inquiry is a way of knowing
- We are co-learners with students and we co-construct our learning together
- Our learning is rigorous, relevant, and connected to big ideas
- Feedback is frequent and informs our next steps
- Learning includes choice
- We share high expectations
- Learning includes choice
- We share high expectations

Criteria for Premier's Award for Innovation and Excellence in Education

Evidence of direct Board influence and participation in the innovation

The philosophy behind *My Prairie Spirit Classroom* originated in the Board of Education's strategic plan and beliefs about the desirable conditions to facilitate learning. In the Board's strategic plan, the focus is on "learning for life". This learning is not limited to students, but also includes all adults in the school division.

As reflected in its budget plan, the Board is committed to supporting student and adult learning.

The Prairie Spirit Board of Education is extremely proud of the ground-breaking work represented in the MPSC document.

Innovative nature of the program or project

MPSC is an innovative approach to leading learning within a school division. The document was created and refined by learning leaders throughout the school division, based on research and best practices. The document encompasses the school division's beliefs and commitments for learning.

MPSC has been a focus for the school division for three years. Other school divisions have requested a copy of this document and have modified it for their own purposes. In fact, this document has been shared and adapted by jurisdictions across Canada and outside the country.

Sustainability of the innovation within the present system

My Prairie Spirit Classroom has been shaping and influencing the learning culture in Prairie Spirit since the 2015/16 school year. There has been significant positive feedback about this document and its effectiveness from administrators, teachers and students.

The adoption and actualization of MPSC is reflected in many of the Learning for Life presentations that schools make each year in May. Administrators confirmed the value of this guiding document at the end of the 2016/17 school year by describing that, in five years, all learners in the school division would be saying that *this is the way we do things* in Prairie Spirit.

As evidence of the support for this work, two of our schools have taken the document and tailored it to their school's learning community (Martensville High School and Leask Community School). These documents are attached to this submission.

In tandem with the MPSC document, the school division introduced the role of Learning Facilitators in each of our schools in the 2015/16 school year. Learning Facilitators are teachers with a portion of their time allocated to supporting other teachers to try new approaches in the classroom, based on a learning philosophy of inquiry, engagement, student choice and side-by-side learning, the tenets of MPSC.

Learning Facilitators are a vital support for learning in our schools because, as part of the school staff, they are embedded in the school culture and can work side by side with the adult learners as a support.

Cost of the innovation related to benefits achieved

The *My Prairie Spirit Classroom* document was designed entirely by Prairie Spirit administrators and senior leadership. Therefore, the cost of creation of this anchor document has been minimal.

Client support for the innovation

Administrators and teachers have regularly been asked to provide their feedback about the impact of *My Prairie Spirit Classroom* (MPSC). This feedback reflects a strong support for this anchor document.

Comments from administrators at the end of the 2016/17 school year include:

- “MPSC is simply good teaching practice put into words.”
- “A culture of strong adult learning will translate into better results for students.”
- “This approach has been transformational.”
- “We’re growing as a community of learners.”
- “MPSC is what good teaching looks like.”
- “MPSC encompasses best practice strategies.”
- “All of the MPSC statements are natural and positive for students and teachers alike.”
- “It’s a lifelong process. We will always be able to get better. It’s that freshness. Mastery is just working at becoming better.”
- “MPSC is a description of a highly engaged classroom at any grade level. Students who are challenged with appropriate supports are capable of high levels of learning. Teachers need a perspective of what is important.”

A Prairie Spirit teacher provided the following overview of what *My Prairie Spirit Classroom* means to them:

- Keep asking questions of yourself
- Willing to take risks and try new things
- Never satisfied with where things are at
- Not afraid to ask for help
- Open to being challenged
- Curious
- Taking their lead from students
- Drawing on past successful experiences

Evidence of improved student achievement

This is the start of the third year with *My Prairie Spirit Classroom* at the forefront of our school division. We accept the significant research that has determined that teacher professional development and support embedded at the school level has a compelling impact on student achievement.

Prairie Spirit has a strong focus on adult learning (professional development) within the school setting, supported by administrators, Learning Facilitators and Learning Superintendents and reflected in the MPSC document.

John Hattie has conducted research on influences on student achievement. His research has determined that professional development has a significant impact (.62 effect size) when it:

- Includes observation of actual classroom methods
- Occurs over an extended period of time
- Challenges prevailing discourse and conceptions about learning
- Provides opportunities to talk with other teachers
- Has support of in-school administrators

Because both the *My Prairie Spirit Classroom* document and the Learning Facilitator role support these criteria, we believe MPSC and Learning Facilitators have a meaningful and compelling impact on student achievement. When teachers feel more confident in their practice and experience continued support, student achievement will be positively impacted.

We believe that high levels of adult learning, inspired by high expectations, collaboration and engagement, will positively impact our student learning.

As our students and staff continue to embrace and actualize MPSC, we are confident the outcomes will show that we all know ourselves as learners, as leaders and as contributing citizens in our world.

- “The research has been clear and consistent for over 30 years — collaborative cultures in which teachers focus on improving their teaching practice, learn from each other, and are well led and supported by school principals result in better learning for students.”
(Michael Fullan)
- “The working relationships that teachers have with other adults are closely connected and deeply consequential for the teaching and learning relationships they in turn have with their students.”
(Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992, p.41)
- “We know that the teacher is the most powerful influence on how much a student learns and that teachers can continue to make significant improvements in their practice throughout their entire careers.”
(William, 2011, p.162)
- “Teachers and students go hand in hand as learners or they don’t go at all.”
(Barth, 2004, p. 23)



My Prairie Spirit Classroom

is diverse in worldview, culture, language, gender identity and interests and this is how we learn together.

In my classroom, 20% of the time consists of whole group teacher talk and 80% of the time is student talk (whole group, small group and independent self-talk).

All students participate in side-by-side learning opportunities with me several times a week in each subject area. Side-by-side learning opportunities include descriptive *next steps* feedback or reflective conversations.

My instruction includes opportunities for **all** students to construct knowledge, have choice in learning and experience explicit teaching and modelling of learning strategies that students can apply while exploring new ideas and concepts.

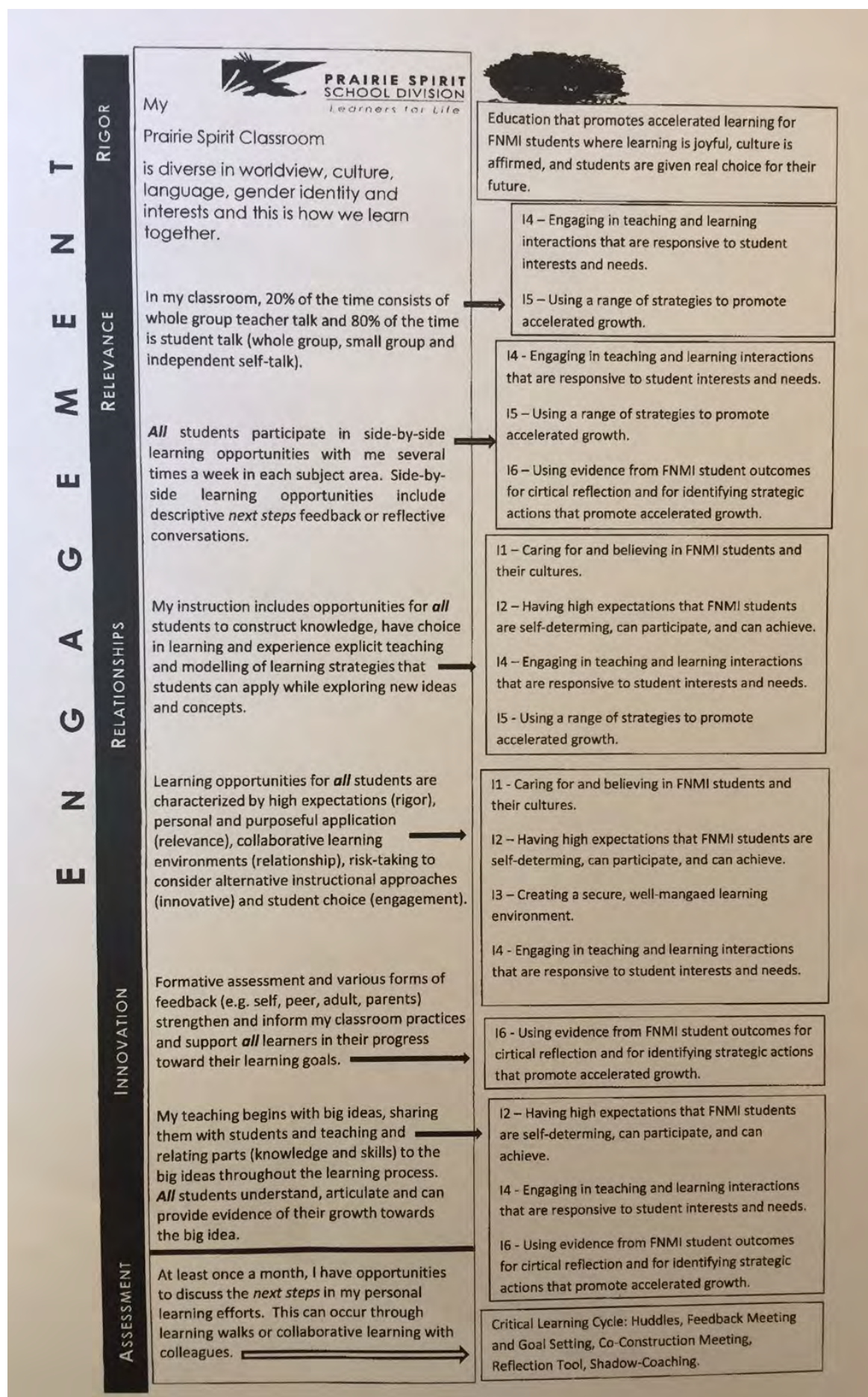
Learning opportunities for **all** students are characterized by high expectations (rigour), personal and purposeful application (relevance), collaborative learning environments (relationship), risk-taking to consider alternative instructional approaches (innovative) and student choice (engagement).

Formative assessment and various forms of feedback (e.g. self, peer, adult, parents) strengthen and inform my classroom practices and support **all** learners in their progress toward their learning goals.

My teaching begins with big ideas, sharing them with students and teaching and relating parts (knowledge and skills) to the big ideas throughout the learning process. **All** students understand, articulate and can provide evidence of their growth towards the big idea.

At least once a month, I have opportunities to discuss the *next steps* in my personal learning efforts. This can occur through learning walks or collaborative learning with colleagues.

My Prairie Spirit Classroom, as adapted by Leask Community School



INNOVATION

ASSESSMENT

RELEVANCE

RELATIONSHIPS

RIGOR



My Prairie Spirit Classroom

In my class
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My students speak on task regularly in class to collaborate, problem solve and build meaning.

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I work with all students regularly one-on-one to "check in", to build relationships and to discuss next steps.

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Constructing / building knowledge is different from receiving knowledge. It leads to ownership. I teach and model how to learn to construct knowledge.

Learning opportunities for *all* students are characterized by high expectations (rigor),
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and student choice (engagement).

I make learning relevant to my students' lives. I challenge them appropriately, seek to engage and build relationships with them along the way. I innovate.

Formative assessment and various forms of feedback (e.g. self, peer, adult, parents)
strengthen
progress to

I plan next steps in teaching & learning based on knowledge of classroom learning (where we are), in terms of understanding and progress

My teaching begins with big ideas, sharing them with students and teaching and
relating

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the big idea.

I use Big Ideas / Questions orient and anchor all learning activities.

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