



# INCLUSION

## BY KATE KERR

Values center our work in School District 46. Values are like strands of a braid – each one is important, yet braided together they make the work stronger and keep the focus on students. Inclusion is a value and way of thinking that is at the very core of this work. Our Strategic Plan, developed by our Board of Trustees in 2019 states, 'We strive to be a diverse and dynamic community through welcoming and inclusive practices.' As we strive for inclusive spaces for all, we also have to consider how the values of equity and Truth and Reconciliation contribute to and strengthen inclusion. The value of equity and the affirmation of our Board of Trustees from our Strategic Plan, 'The Board of School District 46 affirms its commitment to Indigenous Peoples and Reconciliation by building relationships and deepening understanding of Indigenous history, worldviews, and ways of knowing,' braid together this work and guide us.

In a complex, human system like education, we aspire to create spaces filled with flourishing learners who authentically belong to their learning community and who own their personal learning journey. As a school district, what does this look like, sound like, and feel like?

Children are sacred and as a learning organization we are responsible for creating the spaces for all students to belong and thrive. As a district, we have embarked on a journey to embrace inclusion, equity, and Truth and Reconciliation, which we have called "Ensouling our Schools". This particular work was initially inspired by professional learning begun in 2020 with Kevin Lamoureux, an Education Lead for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and an education professor at the University of Winnipeg. He contributed to a book by Jennifer Katz, an associate professor at the University of British Columbia specializing in inclusion and inclusive practices, called *Ensouling our Schools*. We have used this resource to ground us in our work, adding new voices and resources along the way, while also recognizing that we are building on years of foundational work that has been done in our school district and in the community.

"Ensouling our Schools" is our guide to building collective efficacy, a set of common beliefs, in the journey of educational transformation. It is a guide to sharing common experience, common understanding and common language. We see this journey as creating a braid, the fibres and strands coming together to create strength and unity while honouring diversity. It is a binding of all of our strands together, considering our own personal gifts, our collective gifts and where we can continue to grow and learn. The braid is the strength of us all, as well as creating compassionate systems, equity and inclusion, transformative learning and land-based learning for all students, staff and community. The strands do not compete with one another. Instead, they strengthen our ability to do our work to ensure belonging, inclusion and equitable outcomes for all students.

In order to lead and support our journey, a working group was formed, including the SD46 Indigenous Education Advisory Circle co-chair, district staff, SCTA executive, and CUPE executive collectively journeying together to strengthen inclusion, equity and our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation. With this work, we are given the permission to dream, to embark on the heart work and the hard work in the service of students and our future generations.

We have the capacity and the courage to be transformative. Our students, as well as their families and ourselves, can create change. In this we journey together.