

Creating Futures

South Slave Divisional Education Council · PO Box 510 · Fort Smith, NT · X0E 0P0 · Ph: (867) 872-5701 · Fax: (867) 872-2150

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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South Slave Celebrates Outstanding Educators

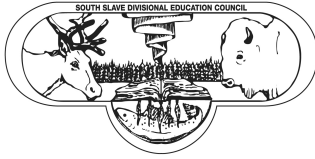
The SSDEC named the 2014 winners of the Excellence in Education Award

Hay River, NT – On August 27th the South Slave Divisional Education Council announced the winners of the **SSDEC Excellence in Education Award - 2014**.

This year's ***Program Staff Award*** winner is **Mr. Craig Walsh**, a long-serving educator in the North. Mr. Walsh served as the principal for *Joseph B. Tyrrell Elementary School* in Fort Smith for fifteen years. Formerly also coordinator of the *Western Arctic Leadership Program (WALP)*, this year he has decided to move on as principal and go back to working with high school students as a trades teacher at the new shop at Paul W. Kaeser High School. The impact he has had as a leader and educator has been felt across the South Slave and the NWT (formerly also Chairperson of the NWT chapter of the *Canadian Association of Principals*). Mr. Walsh has approached all his leadership roles with great compassion, dedication and humour. He approaches *everything* in an optimistic and positive way. Indicative of the support for this award winner, Mr. Walsh's nomination was received with 8 letters of support. Colleagues remember Craig's frequent refrain during meetings and discussions that, "It's about the kids," and his career reflects that philosophy.

The ***Partner in Education Award*** is presented to the **Deninu Elective Facilitators** of Fort Resolution - **Prem Lal, Emily MacLean, Teresa Simon, Kim Beck, and Kirsten Boucher**. In the 2013-2014 school year, the principal and staff at Deninu School began a program to expose students to a variety of vocational programs not normally available in small schools. The school's time table was changed so that the last hour of every school day could be used for six-week electives offered on alternating days. Teaching staff and members of the community came forward to teach different trades and skills. Community members teach welding, sewing, hairdressing, childcare, cooking and cake decorating, to name a few. The students of Deninu have embraced the program wholeheartedly. Attendance is up compared to last year and some students are displaying great talent in these fields. Without the participation of these community members, the program could not offer the variety and depth of trades it does. This award is presented in recognition of the positive impact and the commitment of these five community educators.

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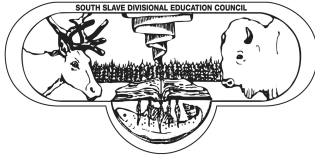
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The purpose of the *SSDEC Excellence in Education Awards* is to publicly recognize the sustained commitments and outstanding contributions made by staff, parents and community members in helping to create the best possible futures for South Slave students. The *SSDEC Excellence in Education Award* is awarded annually to a recipient(s) nominated by their peers and selected from the following two categories:

- *Program Staff* – includes teachers, administrators, consultants and education assistants service South Slave schools
- *Partners in Education* – includes support staff (eg. secretaries and custodians), parents, students, volunteers and other community members, groups, or organizations that work in support of student learning

2014 SSDEC Excellence in Education Awards Recipient Backgrounders attached

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SSDEC Excellence in Education Award – Program Staff

Craig Walsh, Educator, Fort Smith

Great leaders are not only great themselves but bring out greatness in others. Great leaders not only inspire us to be better, but also support us in our struggles, help us at our low points and bring a smile to our day. Great leaders are volunteers who give back to their communities selflessly and without hesitation.

It is fair to say that after his long tenure as principal of Joseph B. Tyrrell Elementary School that Craig Walsh fits that description to a tee. Over the course of fifteen years as principal and years before that as a classroom teacher Craig Walsh has had a tremendous impact on the students who have passed through his care.

Craig began his career in his home province of Newfoundland in the small community of Davis Inlet, Labrador. Here he met his wife, Pam, also a teacher and together they travelled north in 1993. Craig joined the staff of Paul W. Kaeser High School working as a trades instructor, a personal passion of his. He left for a short period of time to work for the *Western Arctic Leadership Program* and taught critical skills to students living in residence in Fort Smith. In 1997 he returned to the classroom, this time at J.B.T. where he would remain until 2014. In 1998 Craig became the Vice-Principal and the following year he took on the principalship of J.B.T., a post he held for the next 15 years. Next year, Craig is returning to where he started in the Northwest Territories and leading the trades program in the new shop at P.W.K.

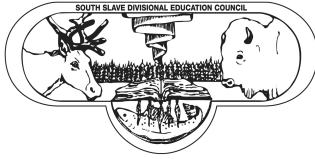
Craig's impact has been felt well beyond Fort Smith and J.B.T, as evidenced by eight strong letters of support to the nomination, three of which were from staff at his school. The rest were from community members and colleagues from elsewhere in the region.

Craig believes in helping people become the best they can be. He has been endlessly supportive of his staff in their professional development. As one nominator put it, "Craig is frequently visible during in-services and during visits to the classrooms. By participating himself, and encouraging his own staff to participate in demonstration lessons facilitated by both outside agencies and regional coordinators, Craig has built his own and the teachers' capacity and acceptance of the value of work embedded training."

Craig leaves a legacy that will not soon be forgot, whether it is his wonderful easy humour, or the care and the willingness to go 'above and beyond' that he has shown his colleagues, by stepping up to drive the school bus when needed for example, or the running of the Winter Cultural Camps that J.B.T.'s students benefit from every year... as examples.

Craig's compassion was especially clear for his students, Chris Philpotts, former principal of Harry Camsell School and Princess Alexandra School, a colleague of Craig said, "Craig believed in cutting edge pedagogy and the importance of the school's focus on each and every child," he added that all of Craig's incredible determination was in the end for the children. At many meetings, in many settings in different contexts Craig could be heard saying, "It's about the kids." Every decision, every thought was in their best interest.

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SSDEC Excellence in Education Award – Partners in Education

Deninu Elective Facilitators, Fort Resolution

In 2013 a new program was initiated in Deninu School. Before it could even be given a proper name the program became entrenched and a beloved part of daily life for students in the high school program. As a small K-12 school in Fort Resolution, Deninu School is unable to offer a full range of courses for the trades. The initial idea for the program developed as an idea to address this shortcoming.

The high school timetable was shifted to give an hour at the end of each day for students to sign up for a number of six-week courses offered on alternating days. Principal Kate Powell asked staff and local community members to compile a list of interesting courses that they could provide introductory instruction in. It did not take long before a well-rounded list of options was provided including: welding, cooking, traditional crafts, computer programming, hairdressing, childcare, and photography, to name a few.

For some of the students this program has unleashed tremendous talent and motivation to complete school and enter the trades. One student came in second place in a Skills Canada Territorial competition and several more placed in regional trades competitions. Photographs taken by students were celebrated by a visiting artist and used on the SSDEC's 2013 Christmas card. Others have taken what they learned and turned into productive ventures, starting their own businesses with an eye towards future training.

Media in the Northwest Territories have taken note of this program and remarked on students' passion for their new skills.

The truth is that none of this would be possible without the contribution of the members of the community who have given up their time to give instruction to young people. Five Fort Resolution residents have been extraordinary and have been acknowledged with the Excellence in Education Partner Award - 2014: Prem Lal – welding, Emily MacLean – sewing, Teresa Simon – hairdressing, Kim Beck – childcare, and Kirsten Boucher – cooking and cake decorating. These people provide superb instruction and worked wonderfully with children, according to Deninu's Program Support Teacher Fraser McTurk, "They have worked with our students to open their eyes up to a variety of careers, hobbies, and skills which our school could not have done without their help... These instructors are warmly greeted by students when they come to school and I have seen the respect given to the instructors and mentorship that is so apparent in this relationship."

It is fair to say that students have been inspired by the elective program and its instructors. Overall attendance is up significantly this year in the high school program. According to Principal Powell students jealously defend their "Electives Hour" against assemblies and other events.

Beyond the positive impact on student attendance is the positive impact this is having long-term on young people. Through patient, effective instruction these facilitators have engaged a larger group of learners, some of whom have, at times, struggled in the traditional classroom. They are provided with tangible role models, people living in their community, working and doing something their passionate about. Suddenly these careers are not so remote - they are attainable.

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