

Irene Nordheim
Assistant Superintendent
Louis Riel School Division

Karen Boyd
Assistant Superintendent
River East Transcona School Division



A vibrant library learning commons culture is growing and thriving in both Louis Riel School Division and River East Transcona School Division. The architects of this enlightened transformation, pushing school libraries to the forefront, are sisters – Irene Nordheim and Karen Boyd – both, highly respected educators, innovative leaders, in-demand keynote speakers, and passionate school library advocates. Together, this dynamic duo is rebooting and reframing the potential of school libraries for a new generation of learners. Throughout their careers, both Irene Nordheim and Karen Boyd have advocated assertively and persuasively for school libraries, supporting the research that a “well-staffed, well-stocked, and well-used” school library “correlate[s] with increases in student achievement” (Oberg, 2012).

In supporting school libraries in their respective divisions, both Irene and Karen have made teacher-librarian advocacy a priority. Both assistant superintendents have been deliberate in seeking out opportunities to promote the instructional impact of the role on learning and teaching – as a literacy and learning leader; a facilitator for inquiry-based learning; a collaborative, instructional partner; and technology integration mentor. As the Assistant Superintendent supporting Library Services in Louis Riel School Division, Irene Nordheim has been successful in gradually restoring a teacher-librarian presence in 12 small schools through the addition of several itinerant teacher-librarian positions. With each small increase in teacher-librarian staffing, small schools are reaping the rewards of the renewed teacher-librarian position on staff. In collaboration with the Human Resources Department and Karen Boyd’s support, River East Transcona School Division is updating their information related to professional credentials for teacher-librarians. Teacher-librarians are now declaring the status of their professional qualifications, as well as their future commitment towards the completion of post-graduate studies in teacher-librarianship, educational technology, learning literacies or related course work.

Irene and Karen recognize that equity for school libraries does not only mean equity of access to physical and virtual resources – but also includes equity of access to qualified school library personnel – both library technicians/assistants and teacher-librarians. In her PHD dissertation on Teacher Read Aloud, Karen’s research reinforced that “the presence of a teacher-librarian proved to have a statistically significant effect on the amount of read aloud in the classroom” (Boyd, 2013). Karen concluded that “teachers need to have access to both the resource of a quality collection of children’s literature, and a qualified person who is able to update that collection and provide support to use the collection in appropriate and effective ways” (Boyd, 2013). The sisters continue to examine meaningful ways in which we can ensure that all school libraries in our divisions will be able to support today’s learners equitably.

In Louis Riel School Division, Irene’s vision for re-imagining high school libraries has been highly successful. Today, high school libraries in LRSD are active, busy learning commons spaces – where it is actually difficult to find an empty seat at certain times of the day. Irene has been proactive in sourcing funding to support many of the structural and pedagogical changes that have transformed outdated libraries into hubs of learning and activity. Behind the scenes, she has been instrumental in bringing stakeholders together and pooling resources to make progressive change happen. In River East Transcona School Division, Karen is supporting a maker culture environment in the library learning commons by equipping all K-8 schools with emerging technologies and opportunities to explore coding.

Both Karen and Irene have always encouraged professional learning opportunities for all school library personnel – teacher-librarians and library technicians/assistants. They ensure that the divisional budget supports opportunities for all school library personnel to engage in a variety of professional learning experiences throughout the school year – mentorship opportunities, job-embedded professional learning, division-based meetings and workshops, professional learning networks, metro events, and library conferences. Karen and Irene are often front and centre at professional learning events for school library staff and their genuine interest in their divisional library portfolios inspires our school library personnel and confirms our important role in supporting the divisional “big picture” for teaching and learning.

Irene and Karen value our school libraries as unique places where students are encouraged to pursue their own interests and passions – where they are motivated to explore and ask questions – where reading communities are fostered and nurtured. The sisters are often in our school libraries and eager to share their lives as readers with our students. Irene and Karen are both always in high demand as guest readers in our schools and school libraries during I Love to Read Month.

When Irene Nordheim and Karen Boyd speak passionately about the impact of school libraries on student achievement, people listen. They are our trusted liaisons who speak on our behalf and celebrate the invaluable work of school library personnel by keeping school libraries on the radar of the decision-making process. For those of us working in school libraries, regardless of our school division, it

is reaffirming to recognize that these two sisters, working as Assistant Superintendents, at this moment in time, must be kismet – not only for school library personnel – but for every learner, student and educator. Together, Irene and Karen are successfully transforming the potential of over 80 library learning commons environments in metro Winnipeg for a new generation of learners. Congratulations to two innovative educational leaders, authentic mentors, and deliberate school library advocates – Karen Boyd and Irene Nordheim – two most deserving recipients of the 2018 MSLA Distinguished Service Award.