

FROM ME TO YOU

OCTOBER 2023

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Sunil Mattu's Newsletter

EMBRACING THE RIVER: STREAMING AHEAD IN 2023-2024



Sunil Mattu, Head of Schools

We all end in the ocean. We all start in the streams. We're all carried along, by the river of dreams.

Billy Joel, The River of Dreams

It is now 28 years since the dream of Third Schools was drawn on a proverbial napkin and, by almost all reports, 2023-2024 is the best start up in memory. That is thanks to all of you: our parents, students, and staff. Thank you.

We are a community of over 1500 students and families in Calgary, across Alberta, and Internationally. I am hon-

oured and privileged to lead this Independent, Inspiring, and Inclusive School System.

Third Schools is propelled by a deep desire to serve our community. We continue to prove our resilience, always able to 'go with the flow'. Our mission—education **your child's way**—is noble. Our vision—student success—is powerful. We are realizing our dream.

On this Thanksgiving weekend—as we celebrate an abundant harvest and good fortune—I wish that you and all members of your family **are able to 'give thanks and praise'**.

We have so much to be thankful for. Our students are happy and learning. Yes, there are growing pains with some students and in some parts of the system. But we have a plan to overcome these. And as long as we work together to find solutions, we will find our way. There are many years of success behind us proving our ability to make things happen.



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FROM ME TO YOU

EMBRACING THE RIVER: STREAMING AHEAD IN 2023-2024

Why all the 'river' references? Our theme, folks! It is: The River. Our LYNX students are leading the way in embracing the natural world around us. Third Academy students across the system are participating in fall field trips in Chestermere, Bragg Creek, and Kananaskis Country. I am so excited that our students in grades 9 through 12 will soon travel **to see the 'salmon run' and experience 'Super, Natural British Columbia'.** Thank you to all the parent volunteers for making this extended study trip and all our field trips such a success for our students.

In this issue of *From Me to You* I would like to share with you how our adventure began, where we are today, and where we are headed.

What started as a dream of our Founder and now Ambassador at Large, Dr. S. Lal Mattu, has branched into a school system offering programming choice, quality educational programing, and supports to a diversity of students attending Third Academy, ursa, LYNX, and STREAMS Christian Academy. We have undergone transformational change and experienced many trials and tribulations from our very first cohort of 26 students in 1997.

We have a committed and well qualified staff and a good Board of Directors. **The Board 'cares about our students'.** They are representative of the communities we serve, bring a wide array of skills to the table, and are committed to our success at **every level. We're all here, together,** to serve you.

From my family to yours, we extend our very best at this special time of the year.

Sunil Mattu

Head of Schools



FROM ME TO YOU

FEELING FREE AGAIN: A THANKSGIVING MESSAGE

I've noticed a significant change this calendar year as we progressed from spring, through summer, and now into fall. Our community—students, parents, and our staff—present far happier and more relaxed than during the previous few years. Once again, they're full of life—smiles on their faces—and resuming many of the treasured activities previously cast aside. While life, as it often does, continues to 'throw a few tricky waves in our direction', I sense a overarching return to normality. People are joyful and celebratory. The dread of the unknown seems to have been lifted.

Some of us are still in recovery mode. There is work that must be done to catch up both in terms of lost learning and experiences, as well in addressing the latent mental health impacts. While our ursa students and their families by and large were more shielded from the pandemic, the students of many new families that have joined us present with significant deficits that must and will be addressed. As always, we are here to help. Be assured you are not alone. Our children will succeed. This Thanksgiving, **let's rejoice and appreciate our blessings.**



FROM ME TO YOU

SCHOOL STARTUP—FALL 2023

All of us—whether it is our students, parents, teachers, bus drivers, support staff, therapy teams or administrators—always feel a little trepidation going into school startup. No one is ever quite sure what to expect. The launch of the new school year always brings new faces and new routines. Students wonder if they will like their teacher and make friends. I am pleased to report they are doing well.

At the school level, we are committed to continuous improvement. Principals have shared their school plans with their staff and are incorporating feedback. Professional development activities have been ongoing and well received. I am excited by the instructional leadership being developed within our 6 Professional Learning Communities, namely: Literacy, Numeracy, Physical Literacy, Expressive Arts, Educational Technology, and Autism.

I am pleased to report that all units of the Third Schools system did a remarkable job getting things going for the start of the 2023-2024

School Year. It's been the best startup we've had over many years of operation. This accomplishment took a concerted effort on the part of our entire community. Everyone worked together in their respective teams to make things work as seamlessly as possible. And when issues arose, people worked together to address them as quickly and smoothly as possible.

Much of this year's success to date can be attributed to good communication that supports open and honest relationships. People are talking to each other and the conversations are respectful and constructive. We all share a common goal. We all want the best for our students and are willing to paddle hard to make this happen. **At last week's System Wide Professional Development Day**, I asked all staff to work together to the best of their ability in service to all our families.

As our 2023 start up showed us, together we make the difference. Thank you all!



FROM ME TO YOU

WHAT IS THIRD SCHOOLS?

Many members of our community think of us as individual schools—whether that be Third Academy, ursa, LYNX, or STREAMS Christian Academy—rather than the school system that **makes up the sum of our individual parts. That's** not surprising as each school is, by design, extremely unique. We recognize that a single, monolithic school model does not meet the needs of each individual family and student. We celebrate diversity. Which is why we say at **Third Schools: it is “education your child’s way.”**

That said, as a school system, we embrace a set of common values. There are three. Third Schools is:

- **Independent:** as an Alberta Education accredited and funded school system, we **‘serve the public good’**. That means supporting parental choice in education. That means doing so in innovative ways that provide value to our families. That means not only being held accountable to Alberta Education, but also directly to the families that we serve.
- **Inspiring:** purposefully designed to ensure that our 21st Century Learners are Engaged Thinkers. Ethical Citizens, and individuals with an Entrepreneurial Spirit. Our children and students are the leaders of our collective futures. Our greatest hope is for all students to realize their greatest human potential.
- **Inclusive:** that means a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance of, and belonging for, all children and students. Children and students, regardless of race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status, sexual orientation, or any other factors, have access to meaningful and relevant learning experiences that include appropriate instructional supports. We have a programming choice for all kinds of learners, respecting the diversity of the families we serve.



FROM ME TO YOU

STREAMS CHRISTIAN ACADEMY: A ROUGH START

I believe in STREAMS Christian Academy. This non-denominational Christian faith based school has a STEM—Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math—focus. We have also added Reading, Religion, and the Arts to our programming model. We started with 15 students in ECS to Grades 1-7. I can see the program growing in the years to come with hundreds of students attending.

To be frank, we are experiencing very significant growing pains. In order to overcome these difficulties we—parents, staff, and students—need to come together and start **working as a team. I am committed to 'right this listing ship' having invested \$50K in classroom improvements and established a \$300K payroll.**

The first step is to introduce new leadership. I have asked Joe Smith, Principal STREAMS, to take on this very important task. Joe is well experienced, skilled, hard working, and committed to this task. He has a proven track record in new school startups. A man of faith, he cares deeply about our children.

The second step is to reorganize the staffing allocation. I expect all Third Schools staff to act professionally, be prepared to teach, and work together for the benefit of all our students. Teacher excellence means programming excellence. We have no choice but to utilize our limited resources in a fiscally responsible manner. We owe this to all the families and students we are serving.

The next steps:

- Communication channels to be opened up
- Weekly timetables to be reviewed
- Year Plans, Unit Plans, and Lesson Plans to be reviewed
- IPPs to be reviewed
- Supervision schedules to be reviewed
- Classroom observations to be conducted
- Programming review
- Teacher Professional Growth Plans to be reviewed
- A Parent Advisory Council to be struck
- A STREAMS Christian Academy school plan to be developed

By working together, we can get this right and set STREAMS on course.



FROM ME TO YOU

CONSOLIDATION OF THIRD ACADEMY TO THIRD SCHOOLS EAST CAMPUS

Many thanks to Principals Rehana Mattu (Third Academy Elementary), Christos Kazyas (Third Academy Junior/Senior High) and their staff members for their every effort in making a success of the consolidation of our two Third Academy campuses. This includes our bus drivers and facility teams.

Families that have been with us for some time are aware that our former Third Schools West Campus site was opened to provide for increased social distancing during the COVID-19

pandemic. While this site served us well at the time, it lacked the modern facilities of our new building at 400 Prince of Peace Way. While we realize that the move inconvenienced families living in southwest Calgary, the benefits far exceed the longer commute to our Third Schools East campus.

And the votes are in... Our students, parents, and staff love their new campus! Join us out front with some of our students on a beautiful Fall day. Our kids are great!!



FROM ME TO YOU

LYNX DOUBLES ITS STUDENT BODY FOR 2023-2024

“Where Outdoors is In”

No classroom, no desks, no walls if you so choose. Instead of learning about the wetlands in a textbook, LYNX Calgary and LYNX Cochrane students are exploring real ponds, scooping up specimens, and studying live creatures. Students experience learning in a real world, kinesthetic approach. By connecting to the land, they also gain respect, appreciation, and understanding of their environment and our place within it. All LYNX programming is ‘nature inspired’.

We also support parental choice. That means there are multiple pathways to LYNX: fully teacher directed or shared responsibility, on-site or in the field, Kindergarten to Grades 1-9.

Our classroom is the ‘great outdoors’. Our students are ‘living, breathing, and moving’ every day. Plus, they have access to the Arts, Physical Education, and STEM programming on Wednesdays on site at our Third Schools East campus. All of this makes learning a lot of fun!

While we’re working on continually improving programming, one thing we do know: our LYNX students are happy, healthy, and learning!

Contact Joe Smith, Principal LYNX, at jsmith@thirdschools.ca to find out more and how to apply.



FROM ME TO YOU

NEW THINKING, NEW FEELING, NEW ACTING

For years the terms 'special education', 'special needs', and 'inclusive education' have been banded about. Our students have typically experienced lack of understanding, lack of support, and lack of success in the local school. Third Academy is on a mission to change that.

I feel that all of our students have strengths as well as areas of need. We need to build on those strengths while focusing on weaknesses. I want to think of our Third Academy students as SWANS: Students With Additional Needs.

What is the plan to going forward for our SWANS?

- ◆ More SLP and OT support
- ◆ A reinvigorated Psychology Department
- ◆ Life Skills programming for Grades 9–12
- ◆ Ramping up our Physical Literacy programming to include intramural sports
- ◆ The return of extended study trips
- ◆ Investment in 4 new school buses
- ◆ Facility improvements at Third Schools East campus including repaving, new concrete sidewalks, new parking lot lighting, landscaping, a security door bell at the entrance, kitchen drainage improvements, a new emergency generator, a new fire pump, bringing STREAMS classrooms to standard, and new gym lighting.



ursa offers home based education, including parent directed home education, shared responsibility programming, and fully teacher directed distance education.

Led by Tracy Gilluley, Principal ursa, and Dean Ingram, Associate Principal ursa International, our team of experienced Home Education Managers (HEMS) and Distance Online Teachers (DOTS) support and teach 1000 students across Alberta and beyond.

New for ursa Home Based families:

- ◆ More funding for expense claim reimbursements
- ◆ Little Bears ECS funded for the first time
- ◆ More access to supports for SWANS who are being home educated <https://www.aisca.ab.ca/learner-supports/>
- ◆ Access to our Third Schools East campus for home education activities in the Calgary area
- ◆ ursa International expands to Senegal and looks to establish a Portugal based hub

FROM ME TO YOU
SUNIL MATTU'S NEWSLETTER

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Need More Information?
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**“Third Schools gives hope... hope
 for kids, families, and our
 collective futures.”**

Dr. S. Lal. Mattu, Third Academy
 Ambassador-at-Large

- Fully accredited by Alberta Education and COGNIA
- Third Academy: Serving special needs students in Grades 1-12
- **‘Nature inspired’ programming through LYNX and LYNX ECS Kindergarten plus Grades 1-9**
- Parent directed home education through **ursa** Grades 1-12 plus Little Bears Kindergarten
- Shared responsibility home education through **ursa** Grades 1-12
- Fully teacher directed distance online education through **ursa** Distance Grades 1-12
- **ursa** International Grades 1-12
- STREAMS offering Christian faith-based program with an emphasis on STEM curriculum for ECS and Grades 1-9
- A non-profit, charitable organization
- Doing whatever it takes to help your student succeed



**Success is a
 choice.**

It's mine.

FOLLOW US ON THE WEB!

Be sure to visit our websites. We now have five!

<https://thirdschools.ca>

<https://thirdacademy.ca>

<https://lynx.education>

<https://goursa.education>

<https://streamsyc.ca>

We encourage you to “spread the word” about how we are helping students succeed by posting links to our websites on your social media channels.

