



*Achieving Equality in Seven Oaks  
School Division: An Interview with  
Tyler Yip  
by Cheri Foster*

Seven Oaks School Division is an urban school district located in Winnipeg, Manitoba. There are approximately 11000 K-12 students registered in the division's 23 schools. Band is offered from grades 6-12 in all middle and senior years schools, with 2363 students registered in band programs across the division.

In 2012, Seven Oaks School Division initiated a program called "SOSD" (Seven Oaks School Division). The purpose of this program is to provide band instruments to students free of charge. In 2012, all grade 6 students received instruments, and each school year the next grade is added to the program. They are hopeful by 2018, all band students from grade 6-12 will be supplied with divisionally-owned instruments.

The "SOSD" program is built on the philosophy of equality for all students. Many school communities within the division have sizeable immigrant populations, as well as students who fall into a low socio-economic demographic. Prior to 2012, teachers and administrators reported that many students were not able to participate in band because of the cost to rent or purchase an instrument. The board of superintendents and board of trustees recognized the gap in equality that families faced when enrolling students in band, and deemed it necessary for all students to have equal access to divisionally-owned instruments.

In addition to the purchasing of instruments, Seven Oaks School Division also provides ongoing maintenance for instruments purchased through the "SOSD" program. Teachers are responsible for signing instruments in and out for their students at the beginning and end of the school year and keeping track of instruments which require maintenance. Students and their families are responsible caring for the instrument in accordance with the school's expectations.

As a result of the "SOSD" program, there has been a dramatic increase in band enrollment across the division. Prior to the introduction of the program at the middle years level, two schools reported an average of 55 and 81 students in grade 6 band. In the first year of the program, these same schools increased their enrollment to 80 and 123 students respectively. At the senior years level, three schools reported average grade 9 enrollments of 36, 65, and 60. This year, as the "SOSD" program enters high schools at the grade 9 level, these same schools report grade 9 enrollments of 56, 104, and 111 students respectively. Due to the increase in these numbers, band instruction time has increased across the division. Some teachers who were previously part-time are now full-time. Additional teachers have been hired at some schools, while new beginner band classes for grade 9 students have been added at two senior years schools.

By removing the financial barriers of instrumental music education, more Seven Oaks students are able to join band. Teachers within the division work extremely hard to support the initiative by providing students with quality educational experiences and a wealth of musical opportunities. The commitment to the “SOSD” program from both teachers and senior administration has resulted in the creation of inclusive, vibrant musical communities across the school division.

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