

MISSION & MOTIVATION

Support Staff Supporting Students

Mentorship and extracurricular leadership need not be for faculty alone.



Jillian Lamothe is deputy head, finance and operations, at St. John's-Ravenscourt School, a day/boarding school with 860 students in grades K-12 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.
sjr.mb.ca
JLamothe@sjr.mb.ca

In Mission & Motivation, an independent school leader shares a core belief and/or source of guidance or inspiration. Interested in contributing? Please email netassets@nboa.org. In the subject line, type **MISSION & MOTIVATION**.

Tesfu Berhane, supply and copy centre clerk at St. John's-Ravenscourt School, with the soccer players he coaches.

At St. John's-Ravenscourt School, students and staff are quick to use the word "community" when describing what they like best about the school. The 20-acre campus requires over 30 support personnel, all of whom are encouraged to actively engage in student life and integrate themselves into the community.

Support staff are regular participants in classroom activities, such as reading to kindergarten students in "I Love to Read" month, being interviewed by second-graders who are learning about their local community, orienting middle school students to the school's online archives during research projects, and providing workshops in financial literacy to senior students as part of their year-long university prep sessions.

Outside the classroom, support staff help provide students with real-world experiences. Ninth-grade business students borrow small sums from the school to fund small businesses. Finance office staff set up a simple loan agreement and explain what it means to borrow and repay money. Those unable to pay back the loan with their business proceeds are expected to "work off" the loans; they partner with support personnel on tasks such as cleaning and facility setups for a few hours. Students learn the importance of punctuality, meeting deadlines and fulfilling obligations. Staff benefit from the one-on-one interactions with students and the opportunity to impact the school program and students' lives.

Some staff choose to make larger commitments to student life, drawing upon personal passions in roles completely separate from their job

As more non-teaching staff have filled volunteer roles typically held by faculty, the school has established protocols regarding flex-time that enable staff to balance day job demands with volunteer commitments and ensure the school remains compliant with labor law and employment standards. The protocols have clarified expectations and prevented flareups about staff absences.

Like teachers, support staff receive training in working with students and are expected to follow protocols in trip planning and risk assessment. The school subsidizes training and encourages partnerships and mentorship to support staff new to these roles in student life.

description. An administrative assistant created costumes for drama productions. I myself am an advisor to the grad committee and enjoy the chance to work closely with parents and graduating students in planning their formal dinner and dance. It's clear to staff that these are voluntary roles and such involvement is not mandatory.

Supply and Copy Centre Clerk Tesfu Berhane, who is also one of the school's soccer coaches, is a perfect example of how this approach benefits the community. A high-level soccer player in his native Eritrea, Tesfu had never coached before coming to St. John's-Ravenscourt. A dedicated parent coach asked him to get involved and mentored him, and the school paid for Tesfu to obtain necessary certifications. We had to ask multiple times before he agreed to take on coaching; because English is not his native language, he was worried that his ability to communicate with the team would be limited. More than a decade later, he has coached multiple teams to tournament and city championships. He works with the same group of students over two or more years, allowing him to develop strong relationships with the parents and families. He, too, uses the word "community" to describe the benefits of his involvement with the soccer program.

When graduating, students talk about their love of the St. John's-Ravenscourt community and are most apt to mention unique experiences, team activities and favorite mentors — and the mentors named are not always faculty, but sometimes members of the support team. It is truly a community for all. **N**

