

The work and responsibilities of school leaders can vary greatly from elementary to middle to secondary, from region to region, and from school to school.

In our new *Day in the Life* series, we'll share a snapshot of our members in their roles, and find out more about their path, their practice and why they love what they do.

A Day in the Life premieres with Principal Tim Mushumanski of Rosemont Elementary, a K-5 school in Nelson, SD8.

Rosemont is a mindful Community School where students use Calm, Caring, Commitment to Learning, Creativity and Common Sense to empower themselves to embrace challenge and change, foster mutual respect and responsibility, and appreciate and care for their world.

- Rosemont Elementary School Mission

"If you come to my school, you'll see that I don't take myself very seriously; my line is always "welcome to the zoo" because you'll see the energy, and the craziness and holding on for dear life, but we love it."

- Principal Tim Mushumanski

The kids – and the teachers, staff and parents – tend to call him Mr. Mush. And he doesn't mind a bit.

Tim Mushumanski has been an educator for 25 years. He started teaching in Nelson in 1995 right after his practicum, and then took a five-month contract in Fort Nelson: he ended up staying for four years. "It was an awesome start to my career, with such lovely colleagues, all young new teachers with tons of energy, and there were lots of weekends spent prepping in the schools together. My wife and I have very fond memories of Fort Nelson!"

A Day in the Life of an Elementary School Principal



Tim was interested in education from early on. “I wanted to be a teacher and it’s ironic because you spend so much time wondering what are you going to do with your life, how are you going to give back, what is it going to look like. And wanting to be a teacher, I really feel like it’s one of the professions that children are intimately exposed to, so that a lot of them think “I could do this” or “I want to do this” or even “I can do this better”. They don’t have that same close regular connection to a lot of other professions, so they don’t get a good glimpse into that world.”

“So I’m in grade 10, and I decide that I’m going to be a French teacher. That’s my direction, straight out of high school, straight into University. I didn’t backpack across Europe or anything like that. This is what I wanted to do and I’ve never really looked back, never regretted it. For me, I feel like this is what I was meant to do.”

Tim and his wife Janet chose to settle and raise their family in Nelson, her home town. While leadership was always in the back of Tim’s mind, he wanted to first give himself the opportunity to grow as a teacher, and to experience different roles and schools. After about ten years, he went about obtaining his Master’s Degree. “So I did my degree while teaching and raising a young family – my wife will laugh about that, because she’ll say that she did it all, and she’s right! – but that opened educational leadership opportunities to grow: department head, district volunteer positions, education committees, things like that.” After three rounds of applications, Tim was offered a Vice-Principal position at LV Rogers Secondary School in Nelson. “I really loved moving into that position, but you know it didn’t matter to me whether it was Fort Nelson, Salmo, where it was didn’t matter.”

Tim spent nearly eight years at LV Rogers as

Vice-Principal, and enjoyed all aspects of school leadership especially the instructional management piece. “It was a luxury to have another Vice-Principal and a Principal to work with as a team, and what a lovely introduction to administration for me. I really feel blessed that I worked with a number of great Principals and Vice-Principals: there were people moving around, so it was neat for me to work with different personalities.”

After 21 years in secondary schools, Tim moved into a K-5 elementary school Principalship, 200 metres from the front door of his home. The transition from secondary to elementary wasn’t a seismic shift for him.

“Structurally and organizationally, there are some key differences of course. But I find that people are people whether they’re in Kindergarten or in Grade 12, they have their needs: they need to be understood, they need to be supported, they need to be pushed, they need to be challenged. There are differences there, of course, because of their ages, but there are so many similarities.”

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Tim smiles when he thinks about his school. “I really love Elementary. I enjoy the kids and the atmosphere, the energy and enthusiasm. I know I will need to make a change eventually for my career, but there’s a part of me that doesn’t want to leave. I know that’s not very realistic, but I really do love it. I think it’s the unbridled enthusiasm for everything, there’s still a sense of wonder and discovery. There are many things that adults and the older teenagers



Robyn Simard (L), Tim Mushumanski, Meredith Eaton (R)

either take for granted or don't notice anymore, but think of jumping in a puddle and here's a five-year-old who is in their glory and doesn't care if their pants are soaked to the bone: they've had the best day ever."

While he doesn't have a regular teaching commitment at Rosemont, Tim's goal is to get into every classroom multiple times each day. "I do have to admit I get tired sometimes, because I provide a lot of support for kids and meet with lots of parents, but my goal is to get into classrooms, to see what they're doing, see who needs support – whether it's a teacher or an EA or a kid – and see what they're learning, how I can help them. My teachers are great. When I walk in, they'll just either ignore me and keep going or say "hey, I need you right here. You can help with this little one right now." It's important that they see me as a support and know that their learning is important to me, and important for them."

"It takes some of the mystery out of 'the Principal,' for them to see us as real people."

"It takes some of the mystery out of the 'Principal', for them to see us as real people. Not the one who is ready to wag a finger at them, but as somebody who is there to guide, support and help them along when they do make those poor decisions, and to help them fix those mistakes. I don't want my kids to feel nervous about coming to talk with me if they have a problem. I also want to be one of the trusted adults who celebrates the good decisions and moments with them."

Tim has continued to support high school students in his region as he carries into year seventeen as an Advisor for BC Student Voice, the BCPVPA's

initiative that empowers student reps to connect with partners in education about the issues that most affect them. The spirit of student voice is also evident in Rosemont's culture. "We try to empower our oldest kids in the school to be leaders. The true concept of youth having a voice in education matters is just starting to grow in a 10-year-old: they can have a hard time grappling with it. They feel more empowered organizing a pajama day, or those kinds of things. When they get just a little bit older, they really start having direction in leading and decision-making in our school."

When Tim considers the role of a Principal, he pauses for a moment. "It's harder than I thought it would be: I didn't see that when I was a teacher, I didn't see a lot of the things that the Principal did. It's very easy to get bogged down in the organizational pieces, and I always wanted to find that mentor Principal who really had the style of an instructional leader, because honestly we need to carve out more space for that. I want to think I'm really good at leading as an instructional leader but I know that I can still grow in that area. That's my focus for growth, getting in the classrooms and talking about teaching and learning: that's the hard part of our job, I think. Many of us are really good at the organizational piece, dealing with structure, and timetables and schedules and all those things, but you need lots of courage for instructional leadership. I still feel like I'm young, and wonder sometimes how to lead someone who's been doing it longer than you. But the reality is that those folks really are looking for some support and appreciate it.

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The stakes are high: it's about improving things for kids, and doing a good job."

As for the impact that he's made in his career so far, Tim replies, "I'm most proud of the inclusion, collaboration and team effort I've created or enhanced in each school along with the connections with so many skilled colleagues, keen students and supportive parents – those connections are still strong. I don't want to build myself up, that's not the way that I am, but I feel like the schools I have left are in a better position. I am curious when it comes time for me to leave Rosemont how that will feel, because I strengthened the idea of connections, community and teamwork. I want my school to feel welcoming, so if you come to my school, you're not a stranger. If you're a parent, if you're a visitor, you're welcome to check out my school and what we can do for you. So that's what I would want people to notice once I'm gone."

"And for the kids, when they leave the school, I want them to think that "what I did today mattered." That it's not about them, but about what they can do for others. That we belong to each other."

We asked Tim to walk us through a "typical" day for an elementary school Principal.

“We’re very much a Community School: we don’t have buses, so kids get dropped off or walk. On those sunny days, when school lets out, there’s an hour of play in the playground because kids live so close. We just built an outdoor classroom, it’s pieces of stone in a circle, super durable and there’s no structure over top of it, it’s just a gathering place. And there’s a school forest on the property, and across the street we have another community forest. We actually reached a point where we have to schedule class time there, because the classes are overlapping and they’re competing for space.”

“It’s important to me to that our classes get out of the school. We have the traditional classes too, and we have multi-age teams that we break into, and our kids really know each other well. I take the entire school as my class once a week so that the teachers can have collaborative time. We’ll generally be outside, but if the weather is really yucky we’ll go inside and have multi-age groups in four different spaces in the school, and I have EAs (Education Assistants) who help for that 40 minutes, looking after the activities in different spaces.”

“I try to always arrive before the staff – and that’s not always possible, obviously, with two teenagers still left at home. Our staff is very much a texting staff, so they’re often getting a text from me at 7:00 a.m. as a reminder of what’s happening today, or connecting with someone because they’re not going to be there, and making sure that there’s some organization to the day. We have a sign-in book with a few announcements for staff, and I always try to have some kind of silly joke in there. And then it’s important to be on deck as staff arrive, find out how they’re doing and what they need, and then I try to get out on the playground at 8:15 a.m. to do the same with our parents and students as they arrive.”

“We do a morning greeting and announcements outside – it absolutely doesn’t matter what the weather is like – and then we get kids into the school with our youngest learners going first and getting their jackets off and I do the sweep: who is slow this morning, who’s having a meltdown. There are students who need regular check-ins, so they won’t start the morning in the classroom, they’re with me or another trusted adult. And I’ll ask “how was last night, what’s going on for you right now, are you ready to start your day, what are your goals?” – it’s a connection to help with self-regulation.”

“Then I’ll start in the classrooms as they’re getting settled, unless I have a parent who needs to talk to me, or online timesheets for CUPE, or whatever. At recess time I’ll try to get outside but oftentimes I’m inside supporting kids or talking to teachers, and that’s their connection time with me if they need something.”

7:00am

Text reminders to staff, check for staff absences, adjust schedules

7:30am

Arrive at school, check the rooms for heat, playground for items of concern

7:35am

Write daily notes – and a joke or two – in the sign-in book

7:45am

Staff arrive, staff check-in

8:15am

On playground for student & parent check-ins and arrivals

8:30am

Daily school greeting and announcements on playground

8:35am

Move in to the school, beginning with kindies

8:45am

Sweep in the coatroom, and student check-ins

9:15am

Start to visit classrooms

9:30am

Receive call to unplug overflowing toilet: clean up, submit work order

10:00am

Continue in classrooms, provide support for dysregulated students

10:10am

Recess supervision outside, or inside support for students

10:30am

Parent meeting

11:00am

Special needs student support review, meet with case manager

11:30am

Planning for monthly assemblies or multi-age activities or special assemblies

11:45am

Manage grade one meltdown in library

11:55am

Help sort and deliver sandwiches and milk for PAC hot lunch program

12:00pm

Visit classrooms while students eat lunch

12:15pm

Outside supervision

12:30pm

Come in early to support students with conflict on playground

12:45pm

Receive text from staff to help bring in reluctant students

1:00pm

Visit classrooms

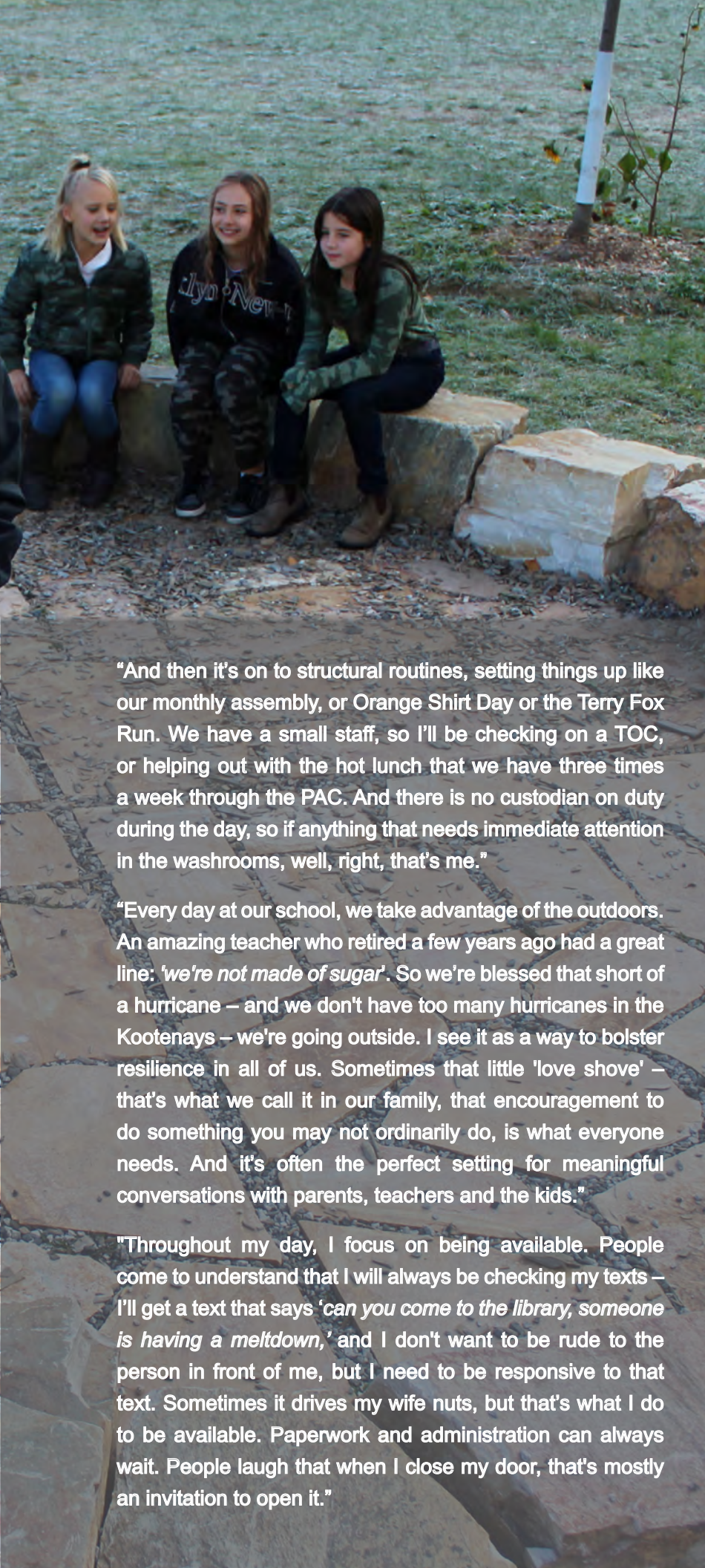
1:30pm

Stay close to the office while secretary has lunch

1:45pm

Help students with Problem Solver sheet at the Thinking Corner





"And then it's on to structural routines, setting things up like our monthly assembly, or Orange Shirt Day or the Terry Fox Run. We have a small staff, so I'll be checking on a TOC, or helping out with the hot lunch that we have three times a week through the PAC. And there is no custodian on duty during the day, so if anything that needs immediate attention in the washrooms, well, right, that's me."

"Every day at our school, we take advantage of the outdoors. An amazing teacher who retired a few years ago had a great line: *'we're not made of sugar'*. So we're blessed that short of a hurricane – and we don't have too many hurricanes in the Kootenays – we're going outside. I see it as a way to bolster resilience in all of us. Sometimes that little 'love shove' – that's what we call it in our family, that encouragement to do something you may not ordinarily do, is what everyone needs. And it's often the perfect setting for meaningful conversations with parents, teachers and the kids."

"Throughout my day, I focus on being available. People come to understand that I will always be checking my texts – I'll get a text that says *'can you come to the library, someone is having a meltdown,'* and I don't want to be rude to the person in front of me, but I need to be responsive to that text. Sometimes it drives my wife nuts, but that's what I do to be available. Paperwork and administration can always wait. People laugh that when I close my door, that's mostly an invitation to open it."

2:00pm

Eat lunch!

2:05pm

Solve school wifi issue

2:15pm

Field phone call from neighbour who saw a bear in the area

2:20pm

Connect with parents ready to pick up their children

2:35pm

Supervise hallway and coatroom during dismissal

2:40pm

Supervise playground and connect with students as they leave

2:55pm

Connect with custodian

3:00pm

Debrief with staff, adjust support and instructional plans for the coming days

3:45pm

Reply to emails and phone calls

4:15pm

Review weekly budgets, school growth plan and staff schedules

4:45pm

Attempt to clean up my office

5:00pm

Make a list of tasks for the next day

5:10pm

Complete one last sweep in the school and head home