

# ARBOS AWARD

## GERRY CRASWELL'S STORY

### 2024 ARBOS FOR DISTINGUISHED SUPPORT OF EDUCATION AND THE TEACHING PROFESSION



Since stepping into his first-grade classroom in 1969, Gerry Craswell has immersed himself into the world of education. His path as a teacher began when he graduated with a bachelor of education from the University of Saskatchewan in 1985.

Gerry continued following a path of lifelong learning, later

receiving his master of education from the University of Regina in 2007.

Gerry's dedication to the field of education has spanned over 37 years. Over the course of his career, Gerry held numerous positions within the education sector. After receiving his bachelor of education, Gerry started his career as a classroom teacher, where he was particularly drawn to the sciences, especially biology and chemistry. He also enjoyed teaching computer applications and other practical and applied arts courses.

Gerry worked in Lafleche for 17 years, where his progression continued as he advanced to roles such as division technology coordinator and principal. In addition to his time in the classroom, he contributed his expertise to the profession, serving as a councillor for the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation for approximately eight years.

Following this period, Gerry joined the Ministry of Education in Regina in 2002, initially working as the practical and applied arts coordinator. He later moved to the role of director of curriculum, a position he held from 2003 to 2011. His career path continued with the responsibilities of registrar and director of Student and Educator Services, leading into a five-year tenure as executive director of Information Management and Support from 2013 to 2019. Gerry concluded his professional career with a nearly four-year stint as Assistant Deputy Minister, followed by a four-month term as special advisor to the Deputy Minister before retiring in December 2022.

Although Gerry has stepped away from formal roles, his impact continues to resonate within the education industry. He serves as a shining example and role model to the next generation of teacher.

#### A CONVERSATION WITH GERRY CRASWELL

##### What inspired you to pursue a career in education?

I would say it was due to having a great experience in my own education, both academically and in extracurricular.

##### What do you love most about being a teacher?

Even though I haven't been a classroom teacher for more than 20 years, I still miss the interactions with the students, engaging with the process of student learning, and the involvement in extracurricular activities.

##### Tell me about someone who has helped shape your life and leadership approach?

While I was teaching, Marion Piche, who was the supervisor of curriculum and instruction in our division was an incredible role model – so professional, caring, compassionate – but had high standards and high expectations of others and supported them in getting to those standards.

At the Ministry, my first director, Lynn Anderson, was not only inspirational as a leader, but also became a wonderful friend. He was a no-nonsense, happy-to-stir-the-pot kind of leader but understood the art and science of teaching as well as anyone I have ever known, and I have worked with many exceptional educators. He taught me that enabling people to do their best work was the most supportive thing a leader can do.

### What has been the biggest career challenge you have faced and how did you overcome it?

There were two – leading the curriculum renewal that was the most significant change in curriculum since Directions 1983, which resulted in the Core Curriculum model. We underwent significant change management processes (internally and externally) and worked very collaboratively with teachers and school division leaders to make the shift from objective-based curricula to outcomes-based curricula. The other was the implementation of a single unified student information system, which became known as MySchoolSask. There were many, many challenges with that project, but most challenging was convincing all divisions, and all other schools, to move to a new, previously unknown student information system when they had all spent many years growing and modifying their own system to get it the way they wanted. It took lots of meetings, lots of communication, a huge amount of effort from our Ministry staff, lots of compromises from all parties, and relentless pursuit of the end goal. Today every student in K-12 education in Saskatchewan is in a single system, something no other province has achieved.

### What are some of your career accomplishments you're most proud of?

On the tangible side, the curriculum renewal of the 2007-2013 years, the MySchoolSask project, and negotiating and implementing the billion-dollar Early Learning and Child-Care Agreement, the "\$10/day childcare" agreement, were all pretty special. Smaller things that I like to think I did, or at least enabled, included the development of the custom textbooks for science, social studies and career development that used Saskatchewan teachers as writers, the development of the e-transcript service that allowed students to apply for transcripts online, the development of the Saskatchewan Youth Apprenticeship Program, expanding the Special Project Credit policy, writing the Apprenticeship Credits policy and the Dual Credit policy, and moving to the new Grade 11 science courses are all things that I am proud of.

On the less tangible side, and undoubtedly more important to me, were the relationships that I was able to establish in the sector, and regardless of how much of an adversarial role my employment position put me in with others, internally or externally, I have always felt that I have been able to be respectful, collaborative, focused on coming to a mutually beneficial solution, and have been open to other people's ideas. I like to think that it was that approach that enabled me to be as successful as I was, and really, why I have the honour of receiving the Arbos Award.



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