

Prairie North Dance

Year Review + Future Plans 2025

2024-2025 Dance Season Review:

Goals:	Successes:	Lessons Learned:
1. Attend more competitions	<p>In the past dance season, Prairie North Dancers competed in the following competitions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. CRN Digital Feile (CRN Christmas Dublin Feile + Rince Na Greine Digital Feis)2. Enchanted Digital Feis Series (February Sweetheart Digital Feis, March Madness Digital Worlds Competition)3. Rockwood Festival of the Arts 2025	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. We really love the Enchanted Digital Feis platform – as it allows us as a small rural school to have access to multiple competition opportunities throughout the dance season with zero travel costs. These competitions provide feedback to all students (which is not something you get in any other Irish Dance Competition Organization!) The syllabus from Enchanted Digital Productions is a mix between CLRG, WIDA, and CRN – so it's very easy to create steps that fit into this structure, allowing us to compete more often with material that our students really love and feel good in their bodies dancing. We also get to network with other schools from all over the world!2. CRN in-person competitions are very difficult to attend in person, but because the CRN accepts results from other orgs – and it counts towards your CRN standing, students can still attend CRN events in the future and be at the level that makes the most sense. Our goal would be to perhaps attend an in-person CRN event once a year or once every two years (on our current trajectory). We can really plan out which ones we would

		<p>like to attend – perhaps prioritizing events in Ireland</p> <p>3. Rockwood Festival of the Arts was a phenomenal experience with fantastic feedback from leading experts in the field of dance! We loved this experience so much, we want to prioritize this type of competition style – setting our sights on competing within the Dance Manitoba provincial competition in the next dance season and beyond, with the express goal of qualifying for national open dance competitions (Dance Canada, Cape Breton Festival, Canadian Jigging Competition, etc.)</p>
2. Provide dancers diverse set of meaningful performance opportunities	<p>Dancers performed at TWO showcases at Prairie North Dance (Christmas showcase and our St Patrick’s day showcase).</p>	<p>Once we build a larger dancer and choreography base for Prairie North, we would love to be able to have students perform in their own schools (for special events or at assemblies), as well as in meaningful community events i.e. The Legion, Fiona’s St Patrick’s Day Event, Seniors Centres in our communities, at Something Beautiful Events, etc.</p> <p>These performance opportunities must feel natural – and not put our dancers or their parents under undue pressure. We want to be in a place where we feel comfortable and prepared for these types of performances – and make sure our dancers are looking at these opportunities through the lens of growth and learning, NOT perfectionism.</p>
3. Prioritize research-based Safe Dance Practices to	<p>Our focus on Education this past year includes:</p> <p>1. Breathing for Peak Performance</p>	<p>Dance in general is about 15 years behind sports in terms of biomechanical understanding of how to best protect and preserve the body, and sports psychology. Irish Dance is 15 years behind dance.</p>

<p>support our goal of “Dancers for Life”</p>	<p>(functional exercises for dance, yoga and pilates)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Careers in Dance – Practical Guidance from the Field 3. Intro to Dance Psychology for Artistic and Performance Excellence 4. Dancer Wellness (IADMS – International Association for Dance Medicine & Science) 5. Conditioning for Dance – Training for Whole-Body Coordination and Efficiency (The Franklin Method) 6. Dynamic Alignment Through Imagery (The Franklin Method) 7. Choreographing From Within – Developing the Habit of Inquiry as an Artist 8. Trauma-Informed Teaching Practices for Dance Educators (Online Course – Human Kinetics Canada) 	<p>Unfortunately, our culturally specific style of dance is one of the MOST harmful to the body and we are doing it operating with knowledge and information that is 30 years behind all other high-impact sports.</p> <p>This is why you see competitive Irish Dancers “retire” at 18. There are many reasons for this, but the main one is the number of intense injuries an Irish Dancer sustains – you simply can’t dance beyond a certain age because your body won’t let you.</p> <p>This is not okay – and we know that dance, and more specifically Irish Dance is part of our cultural heartbeat, and it can and should be done for life.</p> <p>To counteract all the misinformation that exists specifically in the Irish Dance world (that is often perpetuated within the competition setting), Prairie North Dance will always prioritize education and research-backed methods of dance practice.</p> <p>This means our teachers will be consistently learning, growing and training with the best in the field – to pull our dance practice into the present and future, and give our dancers the ability to truly dance for life.</p> <p>The core foundation of Prairie North Dance is “knowledge is power.” And this knowledge NEEDS to be shared. Prairie North will regularly host information meetings so that all of what we learn as the teachers, is passed on to each of our dancers and their families who support them. This gives each of our dancers the</p>
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		<p>autonomy that often is stolen from them within the competitive side of Irish Dance.</p> <p>By taking care of ourselves here in our local dance community, we will be like a lighthouse for others in the Irish Dance world who are looking for a different way to hone their craft.</p>
<p>4. Networking within the dance and creative arts communities to build a strong sense of connection</p>	<p>Prairie North Dance is a registered member of the following organizations:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. daCi (Dance and the Child International) 2. CADA – West (<i>Canadian Alliance of Dance Artists/West Chapter</i>) 3. Healthy Dancer Canada 4. Dance Manitoba 5. Canadian Irish Dance Company 6. Canadian Dance Assembly (CDA-ACD) 7. Cumann Rince Náisiúnta (CRN) – Member of the Executive Health and Safety Committee 8. Our Steps (Jean Butler's Collective) <p>Our adult dancers have been receiving one-on-one instruction from Colin Dunne (original choreographer and lead dancer of River Dance) in</p>	<p>The original dream of Prairie North Dance was to be able to create shows that connect multiple genres of the people who live on this land. To network with other cultural dance practices, we must build our own dancer base first.</p> <p>Irish Dance as a dance form does not currently have a good foundation rooted in safe dance practices, so this is what I am attempting to build here at Prairie North Dance. With a solid foundation, our dancers will be able to have our traditional steps and then move towards a more contemporary style where we share and collaborate with OTHER dance styles to create material that feels good for our dancers when they perform and allows us to tell the stories we want to tell through dance.</p> <p>It is crucial that we choose carefully the types of organizations and people that we network and collaborate with to ensure that the above-mentioned goal is always at the forefront. That our dancers stay protected, in every sense of the word, because when dancers are safe, they have what it takes to challenge themselves and try new things on the dance floor.</p> <p>As I network with professors, Physiotherapists, Dance Psychologists, Somatic Dance practitioners – I am constantly evaluating how to synthesize</p>

	<p>order to reestablish a healthy foundation in Irish Dance.</p>	<p>and integrate what I learn into the dance practice here at Prairie North. This will be an ever-changing and evolving lifelong pursuit! We NEVER stop learning and growing.</p> <p>The psychology piece is much larger than I initially anticipated.</p>
<p>5. Securing more funding – with eventual movement towards non-profit status</p>	<p>Lacey was nominated for a Women of Influence Award – we will find out June 30th if she was selected.</p> <p>Selection would mean we could have access to different types of business loans through RBC, as well as grant money that can be used towards further educational opportunities for teachers/dancers, owning our own studio (instead of renting), purchasing trackers to gain restorative data for my competition dancers, reducing financial barriers to dance for prospective families, etc.</p>	<p>Funding is key!</p> <p>Movement into Non-Profit allows me to qualify for more government grants.</p> <p>Will allow more freedom in terms of classes and class times that I can offer.</p> <p>Gives Prairie North Dance a bigger seat at the table when it comes to writing research proposals through dACi, Healthy Dancer Canada.</p> <p>Increases our positive networking abilities!</p>

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

2025 – 2026 Dance Season

- Restructuring of Prairie North Dance Parent Handbook (to better infuse all the things we have learned over this last year into our dance curriculum)
- Better utilizing Dance Studio Pro and Marco Polo platforms to keep communication lines open between dancers, families, and staff at Prairie North Dance
- Participate in digital competitions (either CRN or Enchanted Digital Feis Series) throughout the entire year IF the dancer/family is on board. *Will have to charge an additional fee for competitions for upcoming dance season – expect to pay between \$50-\$100 per competition
- In-person competitions: Rockwood Festival of the Arts and Dance Manitoba (with potential for adults to also participate in Cape Breton Festival)
- Provide regular Education/Information sessions for dancers and their families – at least once a session!
- Keep the momentum up with regards to mentorship and workshops:
 - Continue to work with Colin Dunne
 - Workshop in the fall with the Gardiner Brothers
 - Potential workshop at the Our Steps base in New York, through their “The Bridge Initiative”
 - Workshop with Brenda Gorlick (infusing somatic dance practice into Irish Dance – Dance for Parkinson’s)
 - Workshop with Danielle Enblom – infusing Irish Dance with Metis jigging rhythms
 - Networking with Allegro Physio (Erika Mayall) to support our dancers with injuries and recovery
 - Potential workshop with Jo-Anne La Fleche (Dance Psychologist)
 - Workshop with ENCORE DANCE (PEI Island Step Dancers)
 - Connect with other Irish Dance schools that are built upon the same tenets as we are, to potentially allow for dance exchanges (i.e. Oregon Irish Dance Academy)
- Create a Prairie North Dance Board of Advisors – meet 1-2 times a year and review our structure and programming and help guide us along our path, to continue to make positive movements forward.
- Achieve not-for-profit / Non-profit status

- Keep dance fun yet challenging – lead by example, so that everyone can see that our teachers are practicing what we are preaching and that we will all be dancers for life. In addition to this, we emulate that life is also vibrant and full of a million other things that make us who we are – we don't have a single identity of "We are Dancers". As dancers, we are full, whole human beings.
- Your body is yours – no one owns you. All our dancers and their families are empowered to make the best decisions for them.

Proposed Schedule for the 2025-2026 Dance Season:

1. Fall Session 2025 (Sept 12 – Dec 19 *Last class for kids is Dec 7th):

Fridays: Advanced Adult Classes – 8:00- 10:00pm (2 hr class)

Dates: Sept 12, 19, Oct 3, 17, 24, Nov 7, 14, 21, 28, Dec 5, 12, 19.

Sundays: Youth Classes

- Beginner (Ages 4-6 yrs) – 3:00-3:45pm
- Beginner (Ages 7-10 yrs) – 3:45-4:30pm
- Novice (Ages 8 & Up) – 5:00-6:30pm
- Ceili Class – For Novice & up dancers, including adults – 6:30-7:30pm
- Advanced (Ages 12 & Up) – 7:30-9:00pm

Dates: Sept 14, 21, Oct 5, 19, 26, Nov 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, Dec 7

2. Winter Session 2026 (Jan 9 – Mar 22 *Last class for kids is Mar 22nd):

Fridays: Advanced Adult Classes – 8:00- 10:00pm (2 hr class)

Dates: Jan 9, 16, 23, 30, Feb 6, 20, 27, Mar 6, 13, 20

Sundays: Youth Classes

- Beginner (Ages 4-6 yrs) – 3:00-3:45pm
- Beginner (Ages 7-10 yrs) – 3:45-4:30pm
- Novice (Ages 8 & Up) – 5:00-6:30pm
- Ceili Class – For Novice & up dancers, including adults – 6:30-7:30pm
- Advanced (Ages 12 & Up) – 7:30-9:00pm

Dates: Jan 11, 18, 25, Feb 1, 8, 22, Mar 1, 8, 15, 22

3. Spring Competition Session 2026 (April 12 – May 31 *Last day for kids classes is May 31st):

Fridays: Advanced Adult Classes – 8:00- 10:00pm (2 hr class)

Dates: Apr 10, 17, 24, May 1, 8, 22, 29

Sundays: Youth Classes

- Beginner (Ages 4-6 yrs) – 3:00-3:45pm
- Beginner (Ages 7-10 yrs) – 3:45-4:30pm
- Novice (Ages 8 & Up) – 5:00-6:30pm
- Ceili Class – For Novice & up dancers, including adults – 6:30-7:30pm
- Advanced (Ages 12 & Up) – 7:30-9:00pm

Dates: Apr 12, 19, 26, May 3, 24, 31

**MANDATORY OFF-SEASON FOR ALL PRAIRIE NORTH DANCERS FROM END OF MAY TO
END OF AUGUST ***

Importance of Rest and Recovery for Dancers

Top 3 myths about Dance include:

1. Time off dance is a sign of laziness or weakness
2. Dancers will get out of shape if they take any time off dance
3. Dancers will fall behind their peers if they take any time off to rest

These are all factually incorrect and yet are EXTREMELY prevalent in the dance world (particularly in Irish Dance where this is NO official off-season) – and even though most dancers and their parents logically know that this is false, the panic and fear-mongering it induces keeps dancers believing at a subconscious level that all of this is true.

So, why are these myths so dangerous to us as dancers?

- Dancers are traditionally exposed to long hours of intense, repetitive training with movements that are characterized by:
 - Explosive force
 - High Impact landing (average CHILD's dance class has upwards of 200 high impact landings per 1.5 hrs)
 - Heavy Eccentric Work (i.e. “negative training” – involves a muscle lengthening while simultaneously contracting, this is the opposite of Concentric movement where a muscle shortens while contracts)
 - Extreme musculoskeletal strain – because dance uses extreme ends of range of motion spectrum during our practice
- What does the research say?
 - Occupational Information Network (O*Net) published a longitudinal study in 2020 that shows Dance is ranked as the MOST PHYSICALLY DEMANDING JOB in North America.
 - This ranking is based on an overall physical demand index score of 97/100. Dancers are ranked ABOVE structural iron and steel workers, Oil and gas, and ALL OTHER PROFESSIONAL SPORTS (over-top of Olympians, professional Football, Hockey, Basketball, Baseball, and Tennis Players)
 - This means that even as children learning to dance, the stress we are putting on our bodies is literally more than anything else you could be doing as a physical activity.

Because of this significant stress we know we are putting on our bodies when we dance, we **NEED** to address that regularly throughout our dance practice to avoid future injuries and burnout.

It's **NEVER** too young to learn about this – and to understand that dance is this beautiful thing we can do with our bodies, but that we also must protect our bodies and give them what they need so we can continue to perform for our entire lives in a way that feels good and keeps us healthy.

BIGGEST ISSUE: Most dancers first (or only) time off dance is **BECAUSE** of a big injury. (which means clearly there are no preventative measures put in place to normalize rest & recovery). This is often psychologically distressing for dancers because they don't know who they are without dance (because it's all they are doing, day in and day out).

HEALING FROM AN INJURY IS NOT THE SAME AS REST & RECOVERY.

Healing = happens after an Injury

Recovery = happens **AFTER EVERY DANCE SESSION** (it's necessary to adapt to training and regain function)

Recovery Pyramid:

The base level, which is the single most important thing a dancer can do to support and protect themselves is: **NUTRITION & HYDRATION**

What the research says: **If you are dancing longer than 90 minutes, aim for a snack break within 30 minutes of finishing your dance class, and then you need a full meal within 1-2 hours of the end of the Dance class.**

This meal needs the following:

- 40-60 g of Carbs
- 15-20 g of protein
- Fluids & Sodium (the more you sweat in the class, the more you need the sodium)
- Calcium (to prevent stress fractures – common in Irish Dance)
- Foods Rich in antioxidants and Omega 3 (to reduce muscle soreness and swelling/inflammation, i.e. berries, kale, flaxseed, turmeric, walnuts, etc.)

Next level of foundation is: **PASSIVE RECOVERY** (doing **NO** physical activity – let your body and mind step fully away from dance – you are completely resting. This can be sleeping, watching a show, listening to music or a podcast, socializing with friends, doing a non-active hobby like drawing, reading, sewing, etc.)

What the research says: **Dancers who are dancing more than 2 hours a week need 1-2 FULL Rest Days PER WEEK. Recovery and de-load weeks need to happen throughout the dance season, approximately every 6-12 weeks. DANCERS NEED A PROPER OFF SEASON THAT IS AT MINIMUM 8 WEEKS LONG (12 WEEKS SHOWS THE MOST BENEFIT)**

- As your teacher, it's my job to schedule recovery as part of your dancers training program (as research shows if you leave it up to the dancers themselves to recover on their own, it's more than likely that it simply won't happen)
- Monitor and adjust training loads based on individual dancers' recovery scores (includes nutrition, sleep, type of training/choreography – we are all different!) *This is where wearable tech comes into play!
- Protect rest days for dancers – to prevent overtraining and under-recovery
- SLEEP: research shows most dancers are NOT getting 8 hours of sleep a night. 80% of dancers experience issues with sleep quality. Average dancer is getting less than 7 hrs a night of poor-quality sleep.
- Professional dancers average 6 hrs a night (for frame of reference professional athletes get 10-12 a night)
- **DANCERS NEED MORE SLEEP THAN PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES**
- Benefits of sleep: gives the body a chance to recover metabolically, allows muscles to repair the micro-tears, mental break (identities of dancers so wrapped up in dance that they can't sleep – this leads to burnout), memory consolidation (this is mostly linked to sleep so this NEEDS to be prioritized)
- **Athletes who sleep less than 8 hours a night are at 1.7 x the risk of sustaining an injury**
- If we could change just one thing that would move the dial on dance the most (towards health, wellness and safety), it would be **IMPROVING SLEEP**. Biggest issue in dance right now is the timing of the shows/performances with travel, and then still having to be up really early and attending classes – all of this impacts length and quality of sleep.

Next Level of Recovery is: **ACTIVE RECOVERY** (low intensity exercise or activity performed AFTER a strenuous activity. i.e. walking, swimming, cycling, light stretching/yoga)

What the research says:

- Dancers in general are happy to do active recovery because of that psychological piece of not wanting to be “lazy” or taking time “off” of dance.
- Benefits of Active Recovery include improved blood flow, reduce lactic acid build up (reduces soreness), remove metabolic waste from muscles, reduces post-exercise muscle pain and fatigue

- If we have had a REALLY intense dance class – we will do a cool down together before students leave. And students on their own can also walk or do yoga, directly after class once they get home. (I will communicate this with parents!)

The next level of recovery is: **NERVOUS SYSTEM REGULATION** (i.e. Regulate autonomic nervous system including breathing, heart rate, digestion etc. This is actually flowing through all levels of the pyramid – but deserves its own section!)

What the research says:

- Two branches of the Nervous system include: Parasympathetic Branch (“rest or Relax” - PNS) and the Sympathetic Branch (“fight or flight” - SNS). Dance triggers the Sympathetic branch to come on, but we can’t have it on all the time because this damages the body.
- Benefits of regulating your nervous system (aka turning off the Sympathetic branch and turning on the parasympathetic branch) is: PNS system facilitates the regeneration, repair and recuperation of all the micro-trauma from dance i.e. decreases HR, blood pressure, replenishes depleted energy reserves
- Examples of regulating include: breathwork, meditation, Vagus Nerve stimulation (humming, laughing, singing, etc.)
- Some dancers can do this regularly without even thinking about it, but others will need specific strategies. We will work with each dancer to see what works the best specifically for their bodies.

Summary: RECOVERY IS TRAINING and dancers should be training recovery in the same way as they train technique or artistry.

As the leader of Prairie North Dance – it is my job to reinforce the need for Rest & Recovery so that our dancers expect to rest. This expectation I hope will spread like wildfire to help get rid of the panic and anxiety we often see in dancers of “I’m now taking time off so I am going to fall behind or lose all of my skill”.

Rest and Recover is what makes you RETAIN your strength, skill, and memory in dance!

I will continue to educate dancers of all ages and their parents/families so that rest & recovery becomes normalized and just a part of dance that we don’t even have to think about anymore, because it’s just happening.

Final thoughts:

Dance psychology – Stoicism culture in dance includes thoughts like “we are warriors, we don’t stop, we are built this way”. This is ingrained in dance and enmeshed in our dancers’ identities.

Dancers genuinely think and feel “if I don’t dance, I don’t exist”. This is untrue and is part of the toxic culture of dance.

We HAVE to combat this in order to create meaningful change in the field of dance. The main way to do this is to ensure that we are always providing and maintaining a psychologically safe environment for all dancers, at all times. A safe psychological space directly equates to a physically safe dance environment.