



# Report to Board of Trustees

April 26, 2021

## Subject: Strategic Plan - Operational Plan for 2020-2021

### Recommendation

This report is for information to the Board and provides Trustees with an implementation update on staff's work regarding the Board's Strategic and Operational Plans. This report also provides an update on the Graduation Rate for the 2014-2015 Grade 9 cohort.

### Status

Given the unprecedented nature of this past year and uncertainty associated with the remainder of the school year, it was necessary to revise our operational plan for 2020-2021. WRDSB's [Strategic Priorities](#), as reflected in our strategic plan, remain the pillars of our work, and continue to drive our operational plan and priorities that have become critically important as staff respond to the realities and impact of COVID-19 along with the global call to action as a result of the ongoing impact and harm of systemic racism and oppression. Our operational priorities for 2020-2021 (see [Annex A](#)) include:

- Continuing our commitment to an organizational culture rooted in human rights and equity
- Ensuring the safety and well-being of staff and students
- Ensuring the continuity of quality learning for all students
- Supporting our most vulnerable students and closing their gaps in learning
- Ensuring continuity of effective operations of the school district

Guided by the WRDSB's three strategic priorities, students have continued to learn and staff have continued to support student achievement - all while maintaining a focus on the well-being, health and safety of students, staff and our broader community. Our community has consistently shared that safety and well-being and human rights and equity need to be of foremost concern and must remain priorities. We also know that there are students who have experienced gaps in their learning as a result of the pandemic; for some, pre-existing gaps have widened, and we have put a clear plan in place to assess, identify and provide intervention supports to ensure that these gaps are addressed and closed.

As a result, staff has continued to invest in our Equity & Indigenous Action Plan - not as a separate plan, but as an essential and foundational element of the work we have been doing and will continue to do. Our ability to be responsive to these challenges is dependent on an organization that ensures the continuity of all of its operational elements including; human resources; financial resources and facilities; information technology resources and communications. All of these operational priorities work

interdependently with the others. We cannot address our most vulnerable learners, for example, without also addressing safety, well-being and issues of human rights and equity while simultaneously providing adequate human and financial resources - they are inextricably linked to one another.

Research suggests that effective change in education will take three to five years of sustained focus and includes monitoring implementation as a critical element of this process. With the support of the Research department, we have continued to monitor the implementation of strategies and related outcomes of the strategic plan (see [Annex A](#) and [Annex D](#)). The senior team consistently assesses and reflects on the various strategies designed to reach our collective goals. This report also provides an update on the Graduation Rate for those WRDSB students who began Grade 9 in the 2014-2015 school year ([Annex B - Graduation Rates](#)).

We are deeply grateful for the energy and dedication of our administrators, educators, support staff, and central staff who continue to focus on the needs of each and every one of our students, despite the many challenges. We are so proud of our students, their ability to adapt, their many accomplishments and their continued commitment to learning and lending voice and insight to our work. We are profoundly grateful for the patience and support of our families and community partners whose engagement and active participation is critical to ensuring the WRDSB is serving our community, and we are appreciative of Trustees' leadership, active engagement and confidence in staff as we have navigated this tumultuous time.

Public education has never been more important, and our ability to be responsive to the changing needs of our students and their families during such a difficult time is critical to the future learning and well-being of our students and our community.

## **Background**

The Waterloo Region District School Board engaged in a collaborative strategic planning process with the goal of creating a multi-year strategic plan that articulated the priorities, desired outcomes, and commitments of the Waterloo Region District School Board for a 3-5 year period. On June 20, 2016 the Waterloo Region District School Board approved the Strategic Priorities, Outcomes and Commitments. Each year, staff provide trustees with regular updates on our progress towards meeting the outcomes related to our strategic priorities as well as the revised annual operational plan for that year. The WRDSB Strategic Plan was due to be refreshed during the 2020-2021 school year; however, the impact of the pandemic required that these plans be put on pause.

In March of 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. What followed from this declaration included the closure of our schools, the launch of a fully distance learning program from March through to June, and major efforts to ensure the continuity of all operational aspects of the school district. The WRDSB formed a Pandemic Response Team and a Return to School and Work Committee and together, with input from our students, staff and families, established

[principles](#) that would guide our decision making and work as we responded to the pandemic.

As the WRDSB has responded to the many challenges encountered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to gather feedback and input from students, staff and families. It is recognized that we need to prioritize this complex body of work in responding to the realities of the pandemic while also delivering on our commitments to do more and do better to support all those who have been disproportionately impacted as a result of COVID-19. Clarifying our operational priorities has also served to stabilize the system as we focus our energies on what matters most.

Our updated Conditions For Learning Framework ([Annex C - Conditions for Learning](#)) also flows from our ongoing community engagement efforts. As a key tool to support “how” we must go about the work of the strategic plan, it clearly provides this informed approach where it states:

***“Together we will nurture supportive relationships in an inclusive, safe and caring environment and practise culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and assessment, creating equitable conditions for learning and optimal outcomes for each and every student”.***

This directs all staff to continue to build a more equitable and inclusive learning community, where human rights and equity are held as fundamental values of our work. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the many inequities faced by students and their families, reinforcing the foundational importance of human rights and equity.

## **Financial implications**

On August 10, 2020, the WRDSB Board of Trustees approved the WRDSB 2020-2021 Budget including funding to support the Board’s school reopening plans at a projected cost of \$10.0M.

Since the Board of Trustees approved the budget, additional funding has been announced by the Ministry of Education. The WRDSB will receive \$18.6M to support school operations in addition to the funding originally announced in the Grant For Student Needs. Quarterly budget updates have been provided to the Board ([January 18](#) & [March 22, 2021](#)) and staff continue to monitor the overall financial impact of the pandemic.

## **Communications**

The Communications Department has developed a multi-dimensional approach aimed at reaching every parent/guardian/student/staff member/stakeholder with meaningful communication during the pandemic. A commitment to accessible, timely, transparent

and two-way communication has been the cornerstone of our approach. Key elements of the communication plan include:

- Health and Safety Protocols and Reminders
- COVID-19 Dashboard
- School and community COVID-19 case communications support
- Regular All-Staff updates to support communication and well-being
- News and School Updates
- Guide for families and staff
- Celebrating and recognizing the contributions and achievement of staff, students and the broader WRDSB community
- Frequently Asked Questions

Staff continues to provide trustees and the public with regular updates and details related to COVID-19 and our operational priorities.

Communications will continue its commitment to ensuring that the Strategic and Operational Priorities have a prominent and dynamic presence as part of Waterloo Region District School Board communication efforts.

The Director's Annual Report also utilized the Strategic and Operational Priorities as a framework for reporting back to our community the work of our district, our schools, our staff, our students, our parents, guardians and caregivers, and our community partners.

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