How the WRDSB is preparing students for a changing world
Praise for Transforming Education: How the WRDSB is preparing students for a changing world

The goals, objectives and evidence laid out in this paper are both concise, and precisely on point. The plan laid out by WRDSB strikes a delicate balance between a focus on literacy and numeracy strategies, while taking into account both cutting-edge research, and local knowledge and commitment to supporting young people in the community. The central focus on supporting student well-being in part by allowing them to ‘explore their own curiosity and creativity’ will have a powerful impact. The entire system needs to be transformed, and flipping the hierarchy - exactly the correct thing to do.

- Dr. Peter Gamwell, Adjunct Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.

Transforming Education’ is a visionary step forward in preparing students and their families for a rapidly evolving world. By addressing the shortcomings of the traditional education system, this vision emphasizes the cultivation of crucial skills such as creativity, problem-solving, collaboration, and critical thinking. It aims to mitigate long standing inequities and offers innovative, grassroots-level solutions to support each student’s unique talents and well-being. This bold re-imagining of education is essential to foster a love for learning and prepare students to thrive in the dynamic future.

- Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad, Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A message from Director jeewan chanicka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Why we need to transform education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Starting the path forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>How we’re preparing students for a changing world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Building strong foundations for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Centring students and their well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Supporting students’ pathways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Innovating through design thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Collaborating with families &amp; communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Despite the rapidly changing world around us, public education has been slow to evolve.

In many ways, we're still following the same education system that was created in the 1800s. While there have been many advances in curriculum and pedagogy, public education systems still function as they did when built to serve the industrial age. How can we prepare students for life in the future in education systems that were created before the invention of airplanes?

Students today will enter a job market where technology has changed how we work and new technologies like artificial intelligence (AI) are transforming workplaces and the world. The skill sets students will be expected to have will place more value on creativity, communication, collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving. To navigate and transform the world, they will need to embody characteristics such as compassion, empathy, respect and citizenship.

The current education system has been proven to fail many students. Too often, a student's identity and socio-economic status predict their outcomes in school.

For the future that we want, public education cannot continue this way. To ensure all students are prepared for the future, we must look beyond the status quo. We must be bold enough to find new ways of learning and knowing. We must fix inequities that the current school system has failed to address, and look for new opportunities to help students explore and grow.

Now is our chance for meaningful change. As the Director of Education at the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), I invite you to re-imagine what school could be and to dream of how it can prepare students for life in the future. How can school nurture and support each child’s curiosity and creativity, love for learning, and unique gifts and abilities? How can it build a sense of connection and community and support students' health and well-being?

You will note that we cite information from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) multiple times. This in no way indicates a belief that we are only preparing students for economic reasons nor do we believe that the purpose of education is only to support the economy. In fact, we believe that we are preparing world citizens and global leaders. We need to integrate multiple ways of knowing and being and think about the type of human beings we want to lead us. We are citing OECD information as often the key criticisms of change has traditionally been that we need to prepare students for the world of work. This has been the argument that has kept education stuck in its “back to basics” past structures.

Much of the work that we are engaged in believes in students finding and following their passions, to thrive and have joy. These conditions for learning are fundamental to creating the type of world that we want - one that is not driven only by economics, but thinks holistically about the type of human beings who will lead us into the future where we all belong and can be successful. We believe that in moving in this direction we can do both - prepare
them to have jobs, through which they will be connected to their purpose, develop a sense of fulfilment and make a difference in the world. The journey is a long one, it is hard at times and absolutely necessary.

At the WRDSB, we're working to transform education for the changing world. Our goal is to create an education system that prepares each and every student we serve for success in the future.

This paper explains in greater detail our vision for transforming education, with some real-life examples of the work already underway in our schools. I hope it inspires you. I invite you to join us on this journey of re-imagining public education for the 22nd century. We cannot do this without centring the voices of students, families and community members, and will be inviting you to take part in this work at many points along the way.

With hope for a bright future for all students in a strong public education system,

Director of Education
Waterloo Region District School Board
Why we need to transform education

“In the face of an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world, education can make the difference as to whether people embrace the challenges they are confronted with or whether they are defeated by them. And in an era characterised by a new explosion of scientific knowledge and a growing array of complex societal problems, it is appropriate that curricula should continue to evolve, perhaps in radical ways.” - Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Around the world, leading global institutions and researchers are echoing the call to transform education. Experts agree that the public education system of today is failing to prepare students for success tomorrow.

Students entering the school system today will be graduating into a world with opportunities and challenges beyond our imagination. Technological advances, combined with social, economic and environmental shifts, will create more instability and unpredictability in the years ahead. To ensure students can succeed in this new world, the education system needs to reassess how and what it is teaching students, and reimagine how it can help students reach their full potential.

“In one study of 2 million online job postings, the top five skills that employers requested were communication, creativity, collaboration, creative problem-solving and critical thinking.” - World Economic Forum

An education that prepares students for the world they will face upon graduation is not just an economic necessity, but it's a fundamental human right; perhaps the most fundamental of all. To fully exercise any of their human rights, students must be supported in laying a strong foundation during their time in school. The first step is ensuring they are able to access it, without facing barriers that limit their ability to participate to their fullest ability.

“To unleash the full transformational power of education and meet international markers of progress such as those of the Sustainable Development Agenda, everyone must have access to it.” - UNESCO

A collective understanding of education as a human right, and the importance of ensuring that children have the opportunity to access a high-quality education, further supports all other human rights. In fact, People for Education helps us to see that “…the right to education is a ‘multiplier’ right, in that it enables us to access our other human rights.”

6 “The right to education,” UNESCO.
Preparing students to succeed in the future they will face is about more than simply providing them with the workplace skills they need, but rather, setting them up to fully understand and access their rights and support the rights of others.

To ensure that all children have access to an education that upholds their human rights, the current public education system must also do better in addressing inequities in student achievement and well-being. Research has shown that many students’ outcomes in school and life are predicted by their identity. According to the United Nations, “in developed countries, education disparities that are often related to income, race and gender are reinforcing privilege and further entrenching poverty.”

The data in Ontario paints a similar picture. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s Right to Read inquiry report, “data linking reading scores to race, gender, socio-economic status and First Nations, Métis and Inuit self-identification data shows that certain groups, particularly boys, Black students, students from low-income homes, and First Nations, Métis and Inuit students are underperforming.”

Facing these realities, it is more important than ever for the public school system to ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn and grow in a way that supports their individual needs.

---


We are committed to transforming education so that each and every student who enters the WRDSB graduates with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their future career, and in life. We have made this our guiding light; our “North Star”. It guides us in our decision-making and reminds us of our purpose.

**WRDSB North Star**
To ensure that identity and social location no longer predict outcomes, TOGETHER we will transform our systems, structures, physical environments and practices to centre the needs, lived experiences, abilities, and stories of students and staff to ensure success for ALL.

**Creating a roadmap through strategic organizational planning**
In 2021, we embarked on this journey to transform education through the development of our new [Strategic Plan](#). To ensure the new Strategic Plan was built to serve the needs of the people we serve, we invited students, staff, families and community members to share what they wanted from their school system. We increased our efforts to hear from the voices of those who are most underrepresented and underserved. This included innovative methods of hearing from more students than ever before. Students were invited to **draw a timeline of their ideal school day** and to write a [postcard to the future](#).

Over 10,000 people, including over 5,000 students, responded. This was the most broad and student centred consultation the Board has ever engaged in, and it led us to a new vision and mission that helped us create the roadmap for how we plan to transform education.

**WRDSB Vision**
Celebrating the gifts of each and every student by creating limitless opportunities for them to flourish, grow and become their best selves.

**WRDSB Mission**
Creating learning environments where all students excel as they become skilled, caring, and compassionate global citizens.

Using the input we received, we established six [strategic directions](#) to help us achieve our mission and vision.

- Centring Students
- Support for student and staff well-being
- Equitable opportunities and outcomes
- Strengthen connections
- Increase student learning through engagement
- Collaboration and compassion for transformation
Defining the future-ready student
We also established the skills we believe students will need in the future.

The World Economic Forum tells us that, “the economies of the future will require advanced skills and abilities to interpret the future proliferation of knowledge and information, and the appropriate attitudes and values to guide those interpretations.”

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defined the attitudes and values students will need in the future as, “curiosity, imagination, resilience and self-regulation; they will need to respect and appreciate the ideas, perspectives and values of others; and they will need to cope with failure and rejection, and to move forward in the face of adversity.”

Of course, assessing the future readiness of students goes beyond solely looking at their ability to contribute economically, as this limited approach omits Indigenous and non-Western ways of understanding and knowing. Building an education system that prepares students to graduate into the world as global citizens, means simultaneously decolonizing that same education system. We must take care in the work of educating future global citizens, as A.A. Abdi explains that these efforts can reflect colonial harms, and centre Western understandings.

Abdi warns that “…the western-constructed new global citizenship education scholarship reflects a neocolonial or perhaps more accurately, a recolonial character that should not be totally detached from the old tragedies of the mission civilisateur.” Further, overemphasis on global citizenship can lead an education system to “…see almost everything from non-Indigenous [perspectives] that still assume a unidirectional learning and development trajectories…”

13 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
With this in mind, we took care in how we defined the qualities of a dynamic, literate and compassionate global citizen, to ensure that the students, families and communities we serve had a voice in the creation of the “Learner Profile”. As a key part of our Strategic Plan, it identifies the key attributes that those we serve believe will help to prepare WRDSB students to be future-ready.

Confident  Creative and Curious  Inclusive  Change Makers
Attentive to relationships  Empathetic  Community-oriented
Setting checkpoints to mark our progress

“A strategic plan is the platform to convey this vision and see it through, but in order to be effective, it must define what success looks like, and be backed by a measurable action plan.” - Future Design School

Now, we’re focused on moving these plans from words to actions. This is part of our aim to continue reinforcing public confidence in public education systems by developing better accountability and transparency mechanisms. We know that we cannot build the system we want without increasing the awareness and understanding of the work we do and for those we do the work on behalf of. With this in mind, we are creating new and more effective opportunities to engage and inform the students, families and community we serve.

To ensure we continue to move in the right direction, each school year we create and share our Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP). The BIEP sets measurable goals in four key areas:

- Achievement
- Sovereignty, human rights and equity
- Mental health, well-being and engagement
- Pathways and transitions

Students
Building on the two Student Trustee positions that make up a key part of our Board of Trustees and bring student voice into our Board decision-making, we now offer a series of Student Roundtables where we actively engage and meet with students to seek feedback on their experiences in schools and classrooms, and where we can share key information with them. Along with our Strategic Plan process, student voice has played a significant role in shaping our Student Dress Code Policy, with more than 200 students engaged as part of its development. The Director of Education also makes a point of connecting directly with students through video messages, helping to answer questions they share and to report back on the work that staff are doing on their behalf.

Community
We have and continue to build new mechanisms to report back to the community we serve. Throughout our extensive consultations with community members, we heard about the importance of closing the loop when asking them to provide feedback. With an aim to address this concern, we are now providing a selection of reports to help the community we serve, better appreciate the work we do, including:

- Annual Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP)
- WRDSB Annual Report
- Community Report Card
- Human Rights Branch Annual Report

But this isn't all. In 2023, we published a report summarizing what we heard through a series of Community Listening Forums, what actions were taken and what we plan to do in the future, to address the concerns shared by the community.

With our Strategic Plan and BIEP to guide us, we have started the work of creating the education system of the 22nd century. Our efforts are focused on five key areas of transformation:

1. **Building strong foundations for learning**, in literacy and numeracy.
2. **Centring students and their well-being**, to ensure they are engaged in learning.
3. **Supporting students’ pathways**, so they can explore their talents and abilities.
4. **Innovating through design thinking**, to develop problem-solving skills in the real world.
5. **Collaborating with families and communities**, to better support students.

### Building strong foundations for learning

Supported by the following Strategic Directions

---

Student achievement depends on a strong, foundational understanding of reading, writing and math. Literacy and numeracy are the building blocks for learning. They are critical to a student’s success in school and life.

The education system must better serve all students in developing these foundational skills. Especially since coming out of pandemic restrictions, researchers Dr. Kelly Gallagher-Mackay and Christine Corso found that “those in Grades 1-3 who were already struggling before lockdowns were up to six months behind where they should have been by September 2020.”

The Right to Read inquiry report shows the gap in literacy skills has also been proven to affect some groups of students more than others. “Reading achievement for Ontario students is concerning, but the outcomes for students with special education needs (excluding gifted), learning disabilities, boys, Black and other racialized students, multilingual students, students from low-income backgrounds, and Indigenous students are even more troubling.”

It underscores the understanding that literacy is a human right.

We must go one step further in our understanding, though, to truly serve the students in our classrooms and schools. As People for Education state, it must be understood that students’ human rights are better upheld with an education that provides them with “…the wide range of skills and competencies they need to become capable human beings with an equitable chance for long-term success and the capacity to participate in democratic society.”

---


People for Education also helps us to understand how “...education is foundational to all our human rights.”\(^\text{19}\) Without the foundational underpinnings of an education that allows a child to freely develop their abilities and grow their knowledge, they cannot fully engage with their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

“Education is a basic human right that works to raise [people] out of poverty, level inequalities and ensure sustainable development.” - UNESCO\(^\text{20}\)

This means that to truly uphold the human rights of the students we serve, gaps in early literacy and numeracy skills need to be addressed as soon as possible to prevent students from falling further behind. Gaps in early literacy and numeracy skills need to be addressed as soon as possible to prevent students from falling further behind. To do this, we are using evidence-based research to help guide how we teach reading, writing and mathematics. We’re implementing and expanding access to programs proven to reach students in ways that are tailored to their individual needs. These strategies are being articulated and coordinated across WRDSB schools and communicated to the families and community we serve through the Math Achievement Action Plan (MAAP) and Structured Literacy Multi-Year Plan (SLMYP).

**Using an evidence-based approach to teaching literacy**

According to a study by Deloitte for the Canadian Children’s Literacy Foundation, children who lack early developmental skills are significantly more likely to be behind in reading by the time they reach Grade 3, and nearly one in eight Canadian children under the age of 15 have literacy skills below their grade level. “These are the children who are most likely to struggle in all school subjects because they don’t have the strong reading skills they need to be successful students.”\(^\text{21}\)

For decades, the Ontario education system focused on a “three-cueing system” and “balanced literacy approach” to teach students reading. Unfortunately, these approaches have resulted in more than 1 in 4 children in Grade 3 who are not reading at the provincial standard, according to the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO).\(^\text{22}\)

Research now shows that “structured literacy” is the best way to build strong literacy skills in students. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, “decades of multidisciplinary research has shown that the best way to teach all students to read words is through direct, explicit, systematic instruction in foundational word-reading skills.”\(^\text{23}\)

Structured literacy is an evidence-based approach that teaches students, starting in Kindergarten, about phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding and word reading fluency.

\(^{19}\) Ibid
\(^{20}\) “The right to education,” UNESCO.
\(^{22}\) “Highlights of the Provincial Results - Assessment of Reading, Writing and Mathematics, Junior Division (Grade 3).” The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), 2023.
“If classroom instruction is based on an evidence-based core curriculum, most students (80-90%) will learn to read words accurately and efficiently, and few students will need more intensive instruction or intervention.”

Ontario Human Rights Commission

Recognizing the need to move to a structured literacy approach in WRDSB classrooms, and in parallel with the newly-released language curriculum in Ontario, we established a Structured Literacy Steering Committee. Made up of Board leadership, researchers and school instructional leaders, the Committee developed a Structured Literacy Multi-Year Plan (SLMYP) to transform how we teach literacy in our classrooms.

With the ultimate goal of ensuring students are reading at grade level by the end of Grade 2, we are now implementing our plan to achieve this goal. The plan identifies three areas of focus - word recognition, language comprehension, and skilled reading - and identifies the specific skills that will be taught for each area. The plan also integrates special education, so that students receive consistent instruction and what they learn in intervention programs is reinforced in the regular classroom as well.

In support of our youngest students, hundreds of WRDSB educators are voluntarily engaging in specialized training to assist them in employing the use of an early reading screening tool. As the first step on their journey to learn to read through a structured literacy approach, student needs are assessed to help ensure the necessary supports are in place to support their success.

The SLMYP uses a tiered approach to supporting the learning of all students. This aims to provide high quality literacy instruction for all, while also catering to diverse learning needs. This includes a focus on meeting the specific needs of:

• Multilingual Language Learner (MLL) Students
• Students with special education needs

To ensure the success of this plan, we have invested in a variety of evidence-based resources, including the University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI) and Heggerty resources. We are also increasing training for WRDSB educators to build their capacity for helping students.

Using Acadience for early screening

Early intervention is critically important when addressing literacy concerns, with the aim of ensuring that no students are left behind. We are investing in the use of Acadience as a universal early literacy screening tool for students in Kindergarten to Grade 2.

Through the use of Acadience, educators can more easily identify students who are at risk for early reading difficulties so they may provide timely instructional support and prevent the occurrence of later reading difficulties.

25 University of Florida Literacy Institute.
26 Heggerty.
27 Acadience Learning.
The interest from educators to use this tool has been overwhelming and it was implemented with more than 9,100 students by 650 educators at 88 schools in the 2023-24 school year. Through programs like this, we will be able to offer more timely and relevant interventions to support student achievement.

**Empowering students through intervention**
When a student is identified as needing further support in literacy learning, we have a team of 37 Reading Resource Teachers (RRT) embedded in our schools to offer that support. Our RRTs are trained in delivering the **Empower™** reading intervention program, developed by SickKids using over three decades of research with thousands of children and adolescents.28

While the Board has been using Empower™ for nearly two decades, we have recently increased our investment to make access more equitable. This meant training more teachers in more schools so that more students can benefit from the program.

According to Kaylie Wolfe, RRT at the WRDSB, Empower™ is much more structured than other resources and even offers scripts for teachers to ensure consistency. “The repetition, correction procedures and cumulative nature of the program are also to a stronger degree in Empower,” said Wolfe.

RRT Jennifer Whittaker has seen major benefits from using Empower™ with her students. “These kids started out knowing approximately 15 sounds, and can now decode multi-syllabic words with ease. More than ever, this program aligns with what is being taught in classrooms, which I’m finding has been such a huge advantage to my students.

They are using their Empower™ strategies in the classroom regularly, and they are bringing their knowledge of spelling rules from the classroom into our Empower™ lessons.”

**Addressing gaps in literacy at every stage**
Although we are focused on early intervention, we are also taking measures to address literacy gaps for students throughout their time in school. This means:

- Increased learning opportunities for educators at all grade levels.
  - To support them in implementing an updated language curriculum that uses the structured literacy approach.
- A new literacy intervention project for students in Grades 7 and 8.
  - Through this program, Literacy Intervention Specialists will work with students, classroom teachers, special education resource teachers (SERTs) and school administrators to develop a structure that addresses missed learning opportunities in literacy.
- In secondary school, students requiring literacy intervention receive support from coaches and itinerant teachers.

The details of this work to support student literacy was laid out in our [Structured Literacy Multi-Year Plan (SLYMP)](https://www.wrdsb.ca/slymp). At every stage of a student’s time in school, we are focusing on providing the resources they need to support their learning.

---

28 **Empower™ Reading and Learning Group.**
Adding new supports in numeracy

Strong numeracy skills are foundational for all students, not only for those considering pursuing career pathways in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). The ability to understand and apply math skills effectively has a direct impact on everyone’s ability to succeed in life. According to the Conference Board of Canada, “inadequate numeracy skills hurt individuals’ potential for landing jobs and promotions and hurt the economy through missed opportunities for innovation and productivity.”

For too long, students who lacked numeracy skills would be labeled as “not good at math” and would be encouraged to pursue other subject areas. We are challenging this attitude; we know that every student has the ability to develop a strong foundation in numeracy skills and we’re committed to providing them the opportunity.

To achieve this, we have developed a Math Achievement Action Plan (MAAP), which sets the bar high for all mathematics programs across the board. As part of our plan, we are investing more in intervention programs and teacher training to offer personalized support to students. We also continue to support the Ontario government’s de-streaming of Grade 9 mathematics and have extended de-streaming beyond Grade 9, to offer only Academic-level math for Grade 10 students.

By supporting students in numeracy throughout their time in school, we can ensure all students have the skills to succeed in mathematics and remove barriers for students to pursue their future goals in learning and life.

Closing gaps in EQAO performance

The 2022-23 EQAO results show that WRDSB students are performing above the provincial averages in Grade 6 and Grade 9 mathematics. We continue to focus on offering intervention strategies for students, particularly those most in need to support students to achieve their full potential and open doors to future pathways.

For Grades 3, 6, 7, 8, new Math Facilitators will be working with schools identified by the Ministry of Education as needing more support. These math facilitators will work with students, classroom teachers, special education resource teachers (SERTs), and administrators to address missed learning opportunities in math.

We are also adding new Math Student Intervention Coaches and Math Itinerant Coaches for Grades 9-10 students, to support students where gaps persist to support their success in de-streamed math.

Expanding intermediate math intervention program

To help better prepare students for high school, WRDSB educators created a math intervention program for Grade 7 and 8 students. Originally piloted in three schools in the Spring of 2022, the program expanded to over 40 classrooms throughout the WRDSB in the 2022-23 school year and is a key pillar in the Math Achievement and Action Plan (MAAP) launched in late 2023. This program uses tiered, small-group instruction to provide more personalized support to students.

“I started this project with one of my four Grade 8 math classes. When I saw results within that one group of students, I decided to try it on my own with my other three classes. I saw an improvement in all four groups,” said WRDSB teacher Amanda Berry.

---

Through the program, teachers, special education resource teachers (SERTs) and math intervention specialists work together to identify strengths and opportunity gaps, then develop strategies to reinforce students’ understanding of math concepts. The program uses three tiers of learning to offer targeted support for students at all levels, and the results are starting to show.

“I didn’t like math. A lot of children didn’t like math because of how hard it was to learn and how difficult to understand in general. The small groups have made me change my perspective on math,” said Laila, a WRDSB student.

Watch our video on this program: Intermediate Math Intervention Program Building Foundations for Success

The WRDSB Math Intervention Model has expanded with the implementation of our MAAP to support students in Grades 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9.
Centring students and their well-being
Supported by the following Strategic Directions:

Since its creation, the education system has operated as a hierarchy. Decisions are made for students, rather than in collaboration with them, leading to a disconnection between students and decision-makers. For some students, issues with mental health and well-being affect their ability to learn. All of these factors can impact student achievement.

To transform education, we must put students at the centre of all we do. We must build a school system that values students’ voices, supports their well-being and allows them to explore their curiosity and creativity. This work can only begin once we acknowledge the direct connection between a student’s well-being, and their ability to achieve academically.

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), “Future-ready students need to exercise agency, in their own education and throughout life.”

As we look to create the education system of the future, we are focusing on increasing students’ sense of agency in their learning, and supporting their well-being so that their minds and bodies are ready to grow, learn and achieve their full potential.

Restructuring the WRDSB around students
Change can be difficult to achieve in large, complex organizations like school boards. With over 65,000 students and 10,000 staff spread out over 123 schools and worksites, we recognized that to successfully transform our education system, we needed to restructure the entire organization to bring the focus to the students we serve.

As part of our commitment to serving the needs of students, we flipped the traditional hierarchy of a school board and put students at the top, followed by the educators and school staff who work directly with them each day in WRDSB schools.

We also restructured our Senior Team, which represents all core functions of the board, from learning support to information technology to facility services. Typically, this structure also follows a hierarchy, with the Director of Education in the top leadership position. Our new structure centres the organization on students, families and the community, with the Director of Education and all members of the Senior Team acting in service to them.

**Engaging student voice to build agency**

To truly centre the education system around students, we must listen to their voices and engage them in their learning. We must also re-imagine how we support students so that they can reach their full potential.

We know that this means supporting students in developing a sense of agency. This is reinforced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Education 2030 framework, as it states that this will be critical to students’ ability to succeed in the future. Agency is created by building a solid foundation in literacy and numeracy, and through a “personalized learning environment that supports and motivates each student to nurture [their] passions, make connections between different learning experiences and opportunities, and design their own learning projects and processes in collaboration with others.”

Rather than telling students what they should do, think and be, we must give them the agency to guide their education and offer support in pursuing their interests and ideas.

---

**What students told us**

We’ve already begun to centre student voice as we build a system where all students have a voice in their educational experiences. Below are some of the insights and themes students have told us matter to them.

Students care about making schools more diverse and equitable, with space to voice their opinions, including:

- More teachers and staff that are representative of marginalized groups
- An awareness of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community and gender inclusivity in schools
- No more segregation by gender in washrooms and gym class
- Easy access to menstruation products throughout schools
- Gym pinnies and other school-related clothing should be inclusive for all bodies
- Designated vape area monitored by staff on-site

---

Students need their well-being and mental health prioritized to stay engaged at school, such as:
- The workload at school is overwhelming for students
- Just showing up at school can be a daily challenge for many students
- Students are struggling with their mental health, and they need more support along with a recognition that there is a lot more to their lives than just school
- Students feel discouraged, disengaged, overwhelmed and behind in school

Students want to see the school system evolve and accept new ideas:
- Update and increase the use of land acknowledgements
- Teaching and evaluating practices shift to accommodate:
  - Different types of learners
  - Different modalities of learning
- Accountability and transparency on speech or actions that are disrespectful toward others
- Cleaner school environment
- Infrastructure improvements and better amenities in schools

Students care about and want more opportunities to learn about identity and well-being to support themselves and their peers:
- Learn about identity
- Topics to improve and support health and well-being in ways that reduce stigma
- More conversations and education on their bodies

Students want to learn and broaden their understanding of more diverse histories globally:
- History and deeper understanding of marginalized groups
- More world history and world topics, not just about Canada and the United States of America

Students value learning skills outside of traditional school subjects and want to learn more skills in the classroom, for example:
- How to properly apply for a job
- Filing taxes and money management
- Coding
- How to navigate and maintain relationships
We are committed to building collaborative relationships with students. We are constantly seeking their input on decisions around their education, and looking for new ways to increase their sense of connection and belonging at school and in the system.

We have moved Student Engagement into the Director's office. At all senior levels, one of the questions we are asking is ‘how are students' voices shaping our actions and our work?’, including at the level of policy and across all sectors of the organization.

To do this, we've developed five strategies to engage with students in meaningful ways:

- **Let Students Lead** - We are creating new ways for more students to participate in decision-making, and democratizing decision-making processes, by building students' capacities inside and outside the classroom.

- **Connect with Students Outside School** - Students have told us they feel more engaged outside the classroom, so we are working with organizations that have strong, existing relationships with youth, to build trust and shift attitudes towards school.

- **Consistent Board Presence in Schools** - We are directly engaging more with schools, attending more student events, participating in more virtual town halls and attending more community events. This will help students “put a face” to the board and let staff hear directly from students.

- **Invest in Student-Led Initiatives** - We are helping students create change by incentivizing and supporting their initiatives, through additional resources and promotion on board-wide platforms.

- **Create a Student Comms Team & Media Pool** - To amplify student voices and share their stories, we are creating a “Student Communications Team.” Student journalists will work as a team to help share stories from across the board from a student perspective while gaining real-world experience.

We're also working on new policies to support student engagement, related to:

- **Mental Health & Wellbeing Awareness, Training & Support** - Students have told us mental health concerns can impact their ability to come to school and engage as their whole selves. We're creating policies and procedures and increasing training to better support students with mental health and well-being awareness.

- **Trauma-Informed Protocols with Students** - We are developing procedures to ensure we safely engage with students and respond to situations in and outside of school using a trauma-informed approach. These will protect students and staff as they take part in meaningful conversations.

- **Student Voice in Policy Review and Development** - We are developing a policy around student interaction with the WRDSB to help define their involvement in policies that directly impact their lives at school and ensure student voice is considered at all levels of their education.

**Rethinking how we teach**

According to the World Economic Forum, “personalized learning is learning that engages each individual student's interests, which elicits engagement and promotes active learning, both of which are found to build cognitive skills, social skills and a growth mindset.”

---

As we look for new ways to support student well-being and centre learning around students, we want to foster their passion for learning. Students should have the freedom to explore their interests and build on their strengths. Rather than fit students into boxes - whether that be by age, grade or subject matter - we are challenging traditional ways of learning and creating more personalized learning experiences for students.

In practice, this can look like Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP). As explained by the Ontario Ministry of Education, CRRP “…recognizes that all students learn in ways that are connected to background, language, family structure, and social or cultural identity.”

Personalized learning is about more than just developing a specific set of skills to succeed in the workplace, but instead it becomes a focus on knowing who the students in our classrooms are. If we know who they are, we can better meet their needs. All of them.

The academic success of students and their well-being are inextricably tied together. CRRP supports a focus on both areas of the students they support. This is why a foundational understanding of the identities of the students and families being served by a school system is vital to rethinking how we teach. Shelly Brown-Jeffy and Jewell E. Cooper state that “…cultural influences affect how students and their families perceive, receive, respond to, categorize, and prioritize what is meaningful to them.”

When we are prepared to meet students where they are on their learning journey, it opens the door to new possibilities for how educators can reach, engage and create opportunities for their students to learn. It also opens new doors and possibilities for how students view themselves as capable and growth oriented learners. Reinforcing this point, Brown-Jeffy and Cooper explain that “children bring with them to school culturally-based ways of doing, seeing, and knowing; in response, culturally relevant teachers find ways to scaffold those cultural experiences in order for the students to gain additional meaning and ultimately be successful.”

“Thinking classroom” puts learning above grades
WRDSB educators like Ashley McCarl Palmer are helping to lead transformation at the Board by using innovative approaches to learning in their classrooms. As an award-winning physics teacher at Waterloo Collegiate Institute (WCI), McCarl Palmer saw that emphasizing grades and test scores in her classroom made students nervous to learn new things.

“Students were focusing on the marks, and not actually the learning or understanding what was going on in the classroom,” said McCarl Palmer.

By taking the percentages and letter grades away, students can focus on what they did well, and where they made mistakes. The process of making corrections and identifying errors becomes a learning opportunity. It all contributes to creating an environment where students feel safe making mistakes and learning from them.

McCarl Palmer uses a “thinking classroom” approach that encourages collaborative learning and group work. In her classrooms, students feel safe wrestling with a problem, leaning on their classmates for support and taking risks on their way to developing a deeper understanding of the subject matter.

35 Ibid.
Supporting Truth and Reconciliation through change to Grade 11 English

As a school system, we are committed to supporting Truth and Reconciliation. We are now offering a new English course in Grade 11 called “Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis and Inuit Voices” (NBE3U), which addresses the Call to Action to make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Indigenous peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory educational requirement for Kindergarten to Grade 12 students. In 2023-24, all WRDSB secondary schools are meeting the Grade 11 English requirement by offering Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Voices (NBE3).

One of the ways we have supported this system-wide shift was to bring together English department heads, Principals, Vice-Principals and teachers from secondary schools across the Board for a year-long collaborative learning project focused on deepening their knowledge and understanding of Indigenous peoples’ perspectives, histories, literature and sovereignty-affirming leadership practices.

Supporting student mental health and well-being

Part of centring the education system around students includes a fundamental understanding that their mental health and well-being go hand-in-hand with their ability to learn and achieve their full potential in the classroom and in life.

Mental health is a growing issue for young people. As many as 1 in 5 children and youth in Ontario will experience a mental health problem, according to Children's Mental Health Ontario. Part of transforming the education system includes finding new and innovative ways to support students' mental health and other factors that contribute to their well-being, such as food insecurity.

To support student mental health, our Psychology department offers regular “lunch and learn” webinars for families on a variety of topics, and school-based social workers provide direct support to students who need it. We also recognize the importance of providing identity-affirming resources and supports, such as System Navigators, Social Workers with an Indigenous Focus, Affinity Groups, GSAs and student well-being teams, and place importance on connecting with students in the ways they need.

We have also built strong partnerships with community organizations, such as Region of Waterloo Public Health, Nutrition for Learning, Food4Kids Waterloo Region, and the May Court Club of KW to ensure that students’ health and well-being are supported, and students have access to nutritious food in school and at home. The Waterloo Education Foundation Inc. (WEFI), a registered charitable foundation which operates through the WRDSB, regularly directs funds in support of these partner organizations. We built on this support in December 2023, with a fundraising campaign in support of Nutrition for Learning.

Additionally, we continue to provide job-embedded learning for administrators with a focus on sovereignty affirming and equity competencies, as well as provide administrator and educator learning opportunities on Dismantling Anti-Black Racism and trauma informed practices. Through the development of community engagement tables involving grassroots community organizations and hosting Listening Forums, we are able to participate in providing wraparound support for students.

---

Helping students create wellness teams at their schools

At a Student Roundtable, WRDSB secondary students expressed their interest in creating school-based, student-led mental health committees, or “Student Wellness Teams”.

In response, we hosted a Student Wellness Conference, where more than 100 secondary students from across the WRDSB received valuable information and resources to help them form Student Wellness Teams at their schools.

Throughout the day, students attended workshops held by WRDSB social workers, mental health professionals and psychologists, as well as community partners, covering a wide range of topics - from procrastination and resilience to gaming and mental health. Students also heard from their peers at Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate & Vocational Institute (KCI) who shared advice on how they run their Student Wellness Team.

Students expressed that the event gave them a sense of connection and shared purpose, and lots of knowledge to share with their friends and classmates at their respective schools.

“I've struggled with my mental health, and I've thought I'm the only one, and that's not true,” said Vaishave Raina, Student Trustee for the 2022-23 school year. “That's why these conferences are so wonderful, because you get to connect yourself with peers who think the same way as you do and you get to kind of create your own little family and you can go to them for help.”

Addressing period poverty through free products

Since 2019, the WRDSB has been providing free menstrual products to students. Prior to this initiative, we found that period poverty existed in 88% of our secondary schools, and 80% of schools were providing menstrual products to students each week. The WRDSB was the first school district in Ontario to offer this in every school and alternative education site.

By providing all schools with free period products, we are supporting students' ability to attend school both physically and emotionally, without stigma or barriers. This is just one way that we're supporting students' well-being so that they can achieve their full potential in school.

Staff well-being linked to student well-being

Supporting the well-being of students means understanding the link that exists between staff wellness and supporting the students they serve. We're taking meaningful steps to better support staff well-being and mental health through initiatives like the “Disconnecting from Work Protocol.”

Aligned with Ontario’s Working for Workers Act, the Disconnecting from Work Protocol sets parameters for employees' availability (e.g., responding to emails) and supports a positive shift in our organizational culture. In September 2023, we shared this protocol with families and the community, to offer increased transparency on these boundaries in support of staff mental health and well-being.
Supporting students’ pathways

Strategic Directions:

With the rapid development of technology - as well as social, environmental and economic shifts, students today will be graduating into a new world of work. They'll be embarking upon careers in fields we cannot yet imagine, to solve problems we have yet to encounter.

Rather than prepare students for specific careers or fields, we must prepare students to navigate a lifetime of continued learning and skill-building to be able to adapt to rapid changes in the workplace.

The Future of Work: Final Report, released by the Government of Canada, explains that the traditional “career ladder” will be replaced by a “career lattice”, which will require “constant skills learning and updating, steeper learning curves, and change management.”

According to the United Nations, “First and foremost, this calls for education systems to embrace the concept of lifelong learning, with more flexible pathways....Transformed education systems should develop flexible career management skills, and promote innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship.”

---


Providing options for students

To help students develop a love for learning and exploration, we provide many options for students to pursue their interests and ambitions. Whether it be through a Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program, specialized (Magnet) program, an apprenticeship or co-op placement, we are helping students gain valuable experience, while keeping options open through efforts to de-stream Grade 9 and 10 courses.

Gaining specialized knowledge through secondary options

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): “Future-ready students will need both broad and specialised knowledge.”40 To gain specialized knowledge, we offer secondary students a wide variety of options to pursue their interests and get hands-on experience.

Through the Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program, students in Grades 11 and 12 get the opportunity to explore a specific community or economic and/or industrial sector. Focus areas include:

- Agriculture
- Arts & Culture
- Business
- Construction
- Environment
- Health & Wellness
- Hospitality & Tourism
- Information & Communications Technology
- Manufacturing
- Non-Profit
- Sports
- Transportation

For students wishing to gain hands-on experience and training in the community while earning credits towards their diploma, we also provide co-operative education placements and apprenticeships in skilled trades for Grade 11 and 12 students through the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP). The opportunities in OYAP through co-op program placements are wide-ranging, and can include:

- Home renovation
- Leadership
- Nursing
- Marketing
- Woodworking
- And more!

Students gain real-world workplace experience while earning credits to propel them on their chosen learning and post-secondary pathways.

We also offer System Designated Specialized and Magnet programs for secondary students, in the following areas:

- English as a Second Language/English Literacy Development
- Extended French and French Immersion
- Fast Forward
- Integrated Arts
- International Baccalaureate

These Magnet programs are a series of interconnected courses that lead to, or support, a student's transition to a specific post-secondary destination.

Extending de-streaming into Grade 10
The practice of “streaming” students into Academic and Applied-level courses in Grade 9 has been proven to have negative consequences for students. Only 59% of students who took the Grade 9 Applied mathematics course moved on to post-secondary education within seven years, compared to 88% of students who took Academic math. Research also shows that students from racialized communities, low-income households, and other marginalized groups are more often encouraged to take Applied-level courses, which then impacts everything from graduation rates to employment opportunities later in life.

To address the issues caused by early streaming, the Province of Ontario implemented a change to de-stream Grade 9 courses, meaning Grade 9 students are no longer required to choose between Applied or Academic level courses. However, evidence shows that Applied-level courses in Grade 10 also have negative impacts on graduation rates and students' abilities to pursue pathways in post-secondary. Therefore, we are extending de-streaming efforts to Grade 10 classes, as well.

The efforts of educators to de-stream Grade 10 math can be seen in Angela Schaefer's math class at Huron Heights Secondary School (HHSS). Schaefer's class is an example of the work educators across WRDSB have been doing in support of de-streaming. The students in this class weren't required to choose between an Applied or Academic level course in Grade 9 or 10, keeping their course options open as they look ahead to Grade 11. This means they will be able to make a more informed decision about what courses they take next year, knowing how the courses they take can support their chosen post-secondary pathway.

By September 2024, most WRDSB Grade 10 students will take only Academic-level courses. This will help keep doors open for students to pursue all pathway options in Grade 11 and beyond.

---

41 Waterloo Region District School Board. “De-streaming for Secondary Students.”
Using technology to enhance student learning and build pathways

No matter what pathway a student chooses to pursue, technology will play a major role in their work and life. It is critical that we help students gain access to, and develop a strong understanding of technology, including emerging tools like artificial intelligence.

According to the United Nations: “If harnessed properly, the digital revolution could be one of the most powerful tools for ensuring quality education for all and transforming the way teachers teach and learners learn. But if not, it could exacerbate inequalities and undermine learning outcomes, as the pandemic made all too apparent.”

To ensure all students have the ability to develop a strong understanding of technology and digital literacy, we provide Chromebooks for all students in Grades 9 to 12. Through the use of Chromebooks and by providing equitable access to technology, students can utilize different digital tools and are able to expand their learning in a variety of ways.

Our school board achieved a significant milestone by adopting Microsoft’s Azure Virtual Desktop (AVD). Through AVD, students in certain classes have remote access to more powerful computing hardware and a wide range of software, including AutoCAD, Adobe Creative Suite and the Microsoft Office Productivity Suite. This allows educators to delve deeper with students in their learning, and encourage them to reach farther in their curiosity, creativity and knowledge.

43 “Transforming Education: An Urgent Political Imperative for Our Collective Future.”
Problem-solving is often identified as one of the most important skills students must learn to be future-ready. We know the traditional public education system is not doing enough to develop this skill in students.

In a survey by the Human Resources Professionals Association, 62% of employers surveyed said new hires lack problem-solving skills. Addressing this gap will be critical to the future strength of the economy. In fact, according to the World Economic Forum: “Investing in just one important skill area - collaborative problem-solving - could add as much as $2.54 trillion to global GDP.”

The proliferation of technology will require the future workforce to think critically and create solutions to complex problems. In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) Education 2030 report, they state: “To prepare for 2030, people should be able to think creatively, develop new products and services, new jobs, new processes and methods, new ways of thinking and living, new enterprises, new sectors, new business models and new social models.” We need to prepare the students of today to have the skills to address the complex challenges of tomorrow.

Gaining new skills by solving real problems
The best way to help students develop problem-solving skills and other valuable interpersonal skills is to give them first-hand experience. According to the World Economic Forum: “Research suggests that experiential learning can help promote positive relationships between students, teachers and the communities they serve, including the promotion of environmental awareness.”

We are creating opportunities for students to be able to identify real-world problems and then create and test solutions both in the classroom and in real life. Through this work, students not only learn how to solve problems, but they learn compassion, collaboration skills and develop a sense of community responsibility along the way.

---

Teaching students design thinking to solve real-world problems
Through a partnership with the Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab (SWRIL), WRDSB educators are receiving training on how they can use the Global Innovation Management Institute’s (GIMI) Impact Program in their classrooms to inspire students to use design thinking to solve problems in their communities.

Teachers who have received the training are applying design thinking with students at all levels in a variety of subjects, from math to geography, to English, Indigenous studies and science.

What started as a pilot project in three rural secondary schools has now grown to 10 out of 16 secondary schools across the Board. Nearly 600 students have taken part in the program. Educators are expanding the program to include Grade 7 and 8 students as well. We saw this at Groh Public School, as students showcased their work through the first Groh Global Gala.

“The idea was to encourage students to look within the school and within their community for problems and challenges and use this design thinking curriculum to propose solutions,” said Carli Parsons, one of the Vice-Principals helping to lead this effort.

While working through the design thinking process, students identify a problem and conduct research to better understand the end users, through interviews, surveys and case studies. On “pitch day”, they present their solutions to representatives of Smart Waterloo Region for a chance to see their project receive funding. Some student-led projects that have received funding have included:

- A smartphone application focused on water quality testing
- Gender-affirming clothing fund
- Territorial acknowledgement plaques at regional airports
- Sexual assault and crisis training program.

For students, this program allows them to learn a wide range of skills, gain real-life experience, and apply their literacy and math abilities, while they develop leadership skills and build a greater sense of empathy. For educators, the program helps them find new ways of teaching and engaging students in their learning.

Innovative medical device design
WRDSB students are also having a world-changing impact outside of the design-thinking program, as they put the skills and knowledge they learn in the classroom to work in their own areas of interest. From the invention of a paper-based blood test to help doctors more quickly identify and treat heart attacks, to the development of a system of soft micro robots with an aim to create a better way to deliver stem cells, to the creation of a low-cost sensor for label-free detection of Malaria, WRDSB students are using their ideas, initiative and what they learn in our classrooms to help them make a positive difference for the world.

Students get charged up for Electric Vehicle Challenge
As electric vehicles (EVs) become more prevalent on the roads, WRDSB students are getting first-hand experience in engineering and building their own EVs by participating in the annual Waterloo High School Electric Vehicle Challenge at the University of Waterloo.
The endurance racing event invites secondary students from across Ontario to compete in EVs of their own design and construction.

In the challenge, teams of students and educators start from scratch to build an EV that runs on either one or two 12-volt car batteries. This presents a multitude of learning opportunities for students, from collaboration and time management, to more specific skills like fabrication, welding or analyzing data. By participating in this challenge, students are able to develop important real-life skills, which will help them as they pursue their pathways in post-secondary education and beyond.

Former participant and recent WRDSB graduate Laila Elhossini shared that she planned to continue working on EVs as a Mechatronics student at the University of Waterloo, and apply the skills she learned through the challenge. “Leadership, communication, organization - it's been a great help learning all these skills,” she said.

Using design thinking to innovate the system
Not only are we encouraging staff and students to use the principles of design thinking to solve problems, but we're using the approach to drive innovation within the Board as well.

Through our partnership with SWRIL, members of the WRDSB Senior Team have completed Level 1 of the Global Innovation Management Institute’s Impact Program, and are now engaged in Level 2. Through this certification, the Board's senior leadership is setting their sights on taking what they've learned and applying it to the work of re-imagining public education. Using a design thinking approach will help us ensure that changes are made in the best interests of students, staff and families.
Collaborating with families & communities

Strategic Directions:

We're transforming public education, but we're not doing it alone. We are working in partnership with those we serve. We need families, community members, businesses and government leaders to help us in supporting student achievement and creating new ways to help students learn, gain experience and take care of their well-being.

According to the United Nations: “A truly transformative education should build on what communities, families, parents, and children treasure most, and respond to local, national and global needs, cultures and capacities. It should promote the holistic development of all learners throughout their lives, supporting them to realize their aspirations and to contribute to their families, communities and societies.”

Our families and community members are critical partners in helping prepare students for the future and ensuring that the education system is serving their needs. As home to one of the world’s fastest-growing technology sectors, Waterloo Region has a strong culture of innovation and vast resources in the community that can help us support students. We are committed to strengthening these relationships and finding new ways to partner with others so that we can improve the learning experience for WRDSB students.

We are guided in this collaborative work by the WRDSB Engagement Charter, which outlines our commitment to realigning the way our systems and structures work to ensure we are meaningfully and effectively partnering with students and community. It is built on our understanding that as we support students in achieving their full potential, we are working together with students, families and community to co-create an outstanding public education system.

Providing more opportunities for families to participate

Researchers Alma Harris and Janet Goodall found that collaborative relationships between families and school staff lead to improved attendance, better student engagement and more positive relationships.

---

To build stronger and more effective relationships with families and caregivers, we have developed four strategies:

**Consulting with PIC** - To improve collaboration between the Board and the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC), we will be providing more clarity and openness around consultation, to give PIC members more opportunities to provide input on key decisions.

**Increase Family and Caregiver Public Consultation** - We plan to host at least three events each year to engage with families and caregivers, through PIC, Waterloo Region Assembly of Public School Councils (WRAPSC) and other groups. These events will be held in accessible spaces and an effort will be made to reach those who may not typically participate in Board events.

**Families Supported by System Navigators** - We have created the role of System Navigator to help bridge the gap between equity-seeking students and families and the school system. Through our System Navigators, families are further empowered to be advocates for their children and students are connected with the supports available to help them remove barriers to success.

**Student-Led Family and Caregiver Education Sessions** - We are supporting the creation of a student-led, all-day event where students can share their thoughts on the future of school, curriculum and education in the region. This event will help families better understand what students learn and value.

We are also re-evaluating some of our current policies and procedures to foster better collaboration between families and the school system, such as:

- Amending the School Council Handbook to clearly outline the nature of our relationships with PIC and WRAPSC and how we consider their input.
- Updating Governance Policy G300 - Policy Development and Review to include engagement as part of an inclusive process to create and refine our policy on student education.
- Create a protocol that outlines best practices for engagement with families and caregivers, such as language and communication considerations, accessibility accommodations and how to overcome barriers in engagement.
- Developed the Waterloo Region District School Board Engagement Charter outlining our commitments to students, families and community members.
Lunch & learns help families and caregivers support their child's mental health
Recognizing the importance of working with families and caregivers to improve student mental health, our Psychology department offers regular, virtual “lunch & learn” workshops on a wide variety of topics related to youth mental health.

Open to everyone, these 30-minute webinars are designed to provide families and caregivers with useful tips and information so that they can better support their children. Topics covered include developing resilience, addressing anxiety in children and teens, and what to do when your child doesn't want to go to school.

Building strong community partnerships
Schools are a vital part of every community, but traditionally school systems act in isolation from local communities. As part of our efforts to transform the education system, we are re-envisioning school’s place in society - putting schools at the heart of local communities, with community partners providing additional support so that we can focus on educating students. For example, building partnerships with organizations that can provide students with clothing and nutrition connects students and families with community partners who can support them in meeting these basic needs.

We are building partnerships with community organizations in two key ways:

- **Systems and Structures** - We are creating new policies to set clear guidelines on how we create and share space with the community, and we are revising our policies and procedures related to the community use of schools so that we prioritize organizations supporting students and families.

- **Community Partnership and Collaboration** - We will be creating more opportunities to meet and talk with various communities and organizations. Our goal through community engagement is to build greater capacity within the system to support students in the ways they need and to support community-led initiatives focused on student well-being and achievement. We also plan to work with community partners to help foster engagement with families and will do more outreach to increase the Board's presence in the community.

Community meetings keep us connected
To help us stay connected with our local communities, we host regular and ongoing community meetings with representatives from local community, cultural and religious organizations, as well as local government officials through a variety of roundtables.

These discussions give us an opportunity to hear directly from the community about their needs and concerns. It also gives us a chance to advocate for the needs of students and families and discuss the issues that impact them.

This holistic approach is designed to create a “village” model to support students. We build a better understanding of how students experience life inside and outside of school, and we are creating the space for productive conversations to help address needs or concerns that arise, both within the education system and in the community at large.
This is a journey and a process. As we continue to work to transform the education system and engage with WRDSB students, staff, families and communities, our efforts will continue to evolve. As we learn and know better, we can be better. This is our commitment to those we serve.

It is our hope that this paper offers more insight into our vision, goals and work for transforming education. We remain committed to listening to the voices of the people we serve to continue to shape and refine our process, strategies and methods. We believe that through building strong foundations for learning; centring students and their well-being; supporting students’ pathways; innovating through design thinking; and collaborating with families & communities, we will be able to transform education to better meet the needs of all students and support them to reach their full potential and find success in their future pathways.

We look forward to your continued engagement and that of all our stakeholders, and we hope that you join us in this journey to create a world-class education system that serves the needs of all students and provides them with the support they need to be prepared for success in the future. This is how we plan to create the future we collectively dream of - one student at a time.