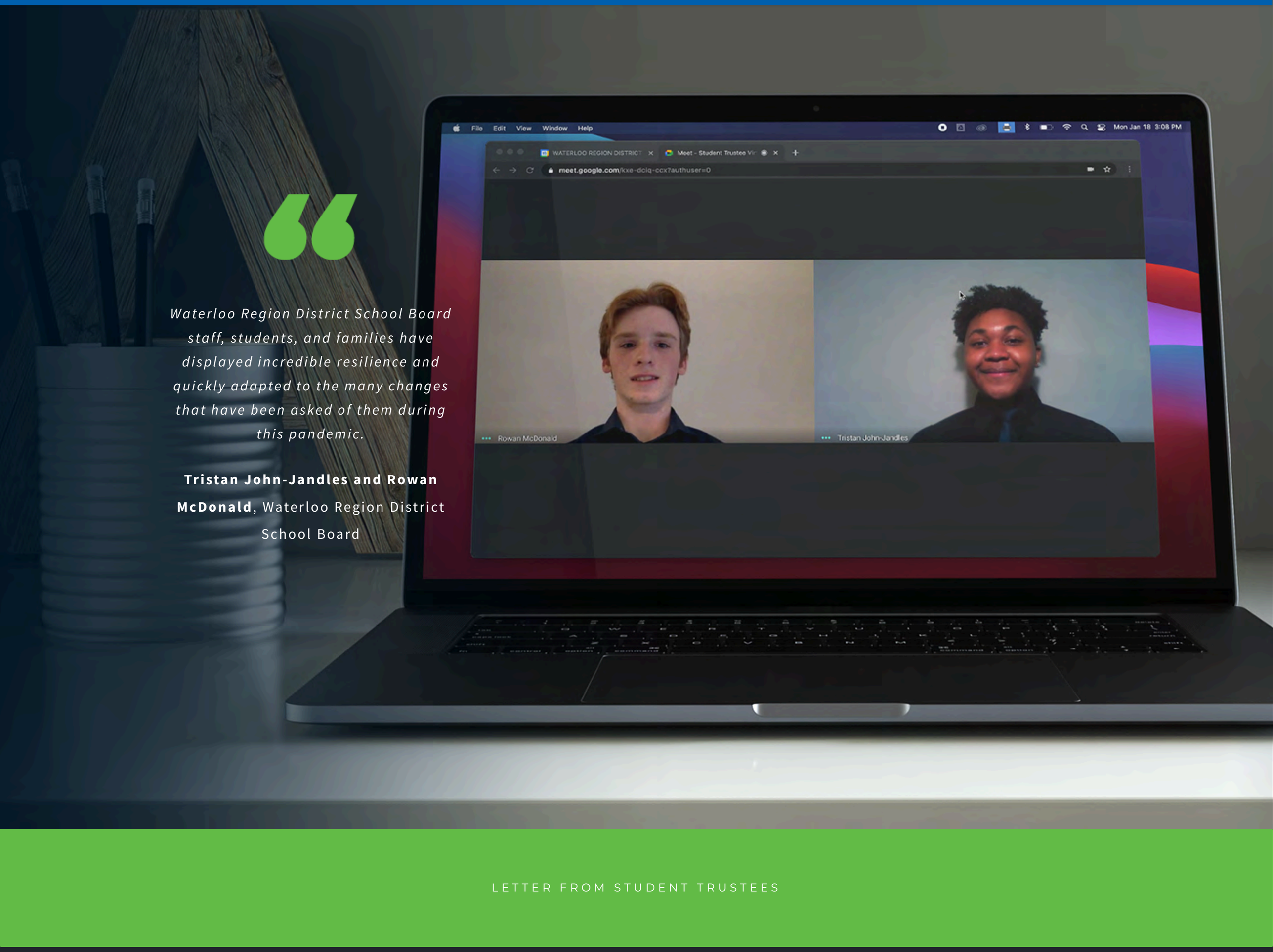
Waterloo Region District School Board

2020 DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT

Educating our students is not a task undertaken by any single individual. Our staff, families and caregivers are all partners in every student's learning journey.

John Bryant - Director of Education, Waterloo Region District School Board

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Waterloo Region District School Board staff, students, and families have displayed incredible resilience and quickly adapted to the many changes that have been asked of them during this pandemic.

Tristan John-Jandles and Rowan McDonald, Waterloo Region District School Board

LETTER FROM STUDENT TRUSTEES

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND COMMITMENTS

Reflecting on 2020, the past year has revealed how truly dedicated our system is to the work of supporting the success of our students, educators and staff. In the face of unprecedented challenges, our entire system continued to move ever closer to achieving our strategic and operational goals. Both in-person and at a distance, we are building pathways to success for our students – each and every one.

Our students are first each and every one

Our staff, families and caregivers are partners

Our culture of innovation builds students' confidence and success

Our commitments

Operational Goals

We are committed to a culture of transparency and accountability. We recognize that achieving the desired outcomes of our strategic plan will require much more than developing goals and establishing targets. Our ability to monitor the implementation of our work and make use of evidence and data to inform our decisions and strategies will be central to the effective completion of our strategic plan.

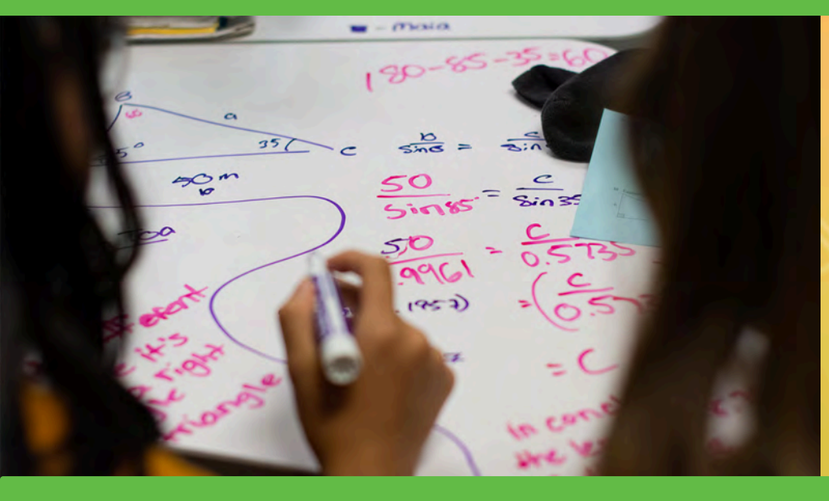
In addition to making consistent use of evidence and data to monitor our work, we will prioritize the wellness of our staff and students. We will work collaboratively to improve our learning and working environments in the best interest of student and staff well-being.

Math

Graduation Rates

Well-Being

Our Stories







READ ALL OF OUR STORIES





Waterloo Region District School Board 2020





Director’s Message

2020 was a year unlike any other in public education. I am so proud of all the work that staff, students, their families and our community members have done in the face of unprecedented challenges and ever-changing reality. This year, more than ever before, it’s my pleasure to present the Director’s Annual Report, which provides an overview of the many achievements realized within the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB).

Looking at the stories we’ve shared from the past year, it’s clear to see that we remain focused on our strategic plan and operational goals, even while navigating a global pandemic. Continuing to build a culture rooted in human rights and equity while working to strengthen skills in mathematics, creating pathways to graduation and success for every student, while also promoting and furthering both student and staff well-being remain at the core of all that we do.

This wouldn’t be possible without the support of our partners and stakeholders. Whether it be our students, their families and caregivers, or our staff, retirees and community partners, we are all working together to ensure our students experience success on their chosen pathway while feeling connected, cared for, a sense of belonging.

I would be remiss if I did not recognize the crucial role that our Board of Trustees play in supporting our students, staff and indeed our entire system. The importance of their role has only become clearer given the challenges we faced over the last year, as their guidance and leadership have helped to centre our focus on the health and safety of our students, while continuing to uphold the excellence in education our community has come to know from the WRDSB.

Equity and human rights remain foundational to the work we do every day – from the boardroom to the classroom. We know that like other school boards across the province, we are faced with the challenge of confronting systemic racism and oppression that many experience. We have more work to do, and our commitment remains steadfast to identifying and addressing the barriers our students, staff and families face. We must make our system a safe, caring, inclusive space for all to learn, work and thrive.

Looking ahead to 2021, we are more prepared than ever before to face the uncertainty and obstacles encountered in a global pandemic, while continuing to

equip our students for success on their chosen pathways after graduation. We may not know what the months ahead will have in store, but together, we will navigate the path ahead.



John Bryant
Director of Education

Our Stories



Inspiring an Interest in Math, Even From a Distance

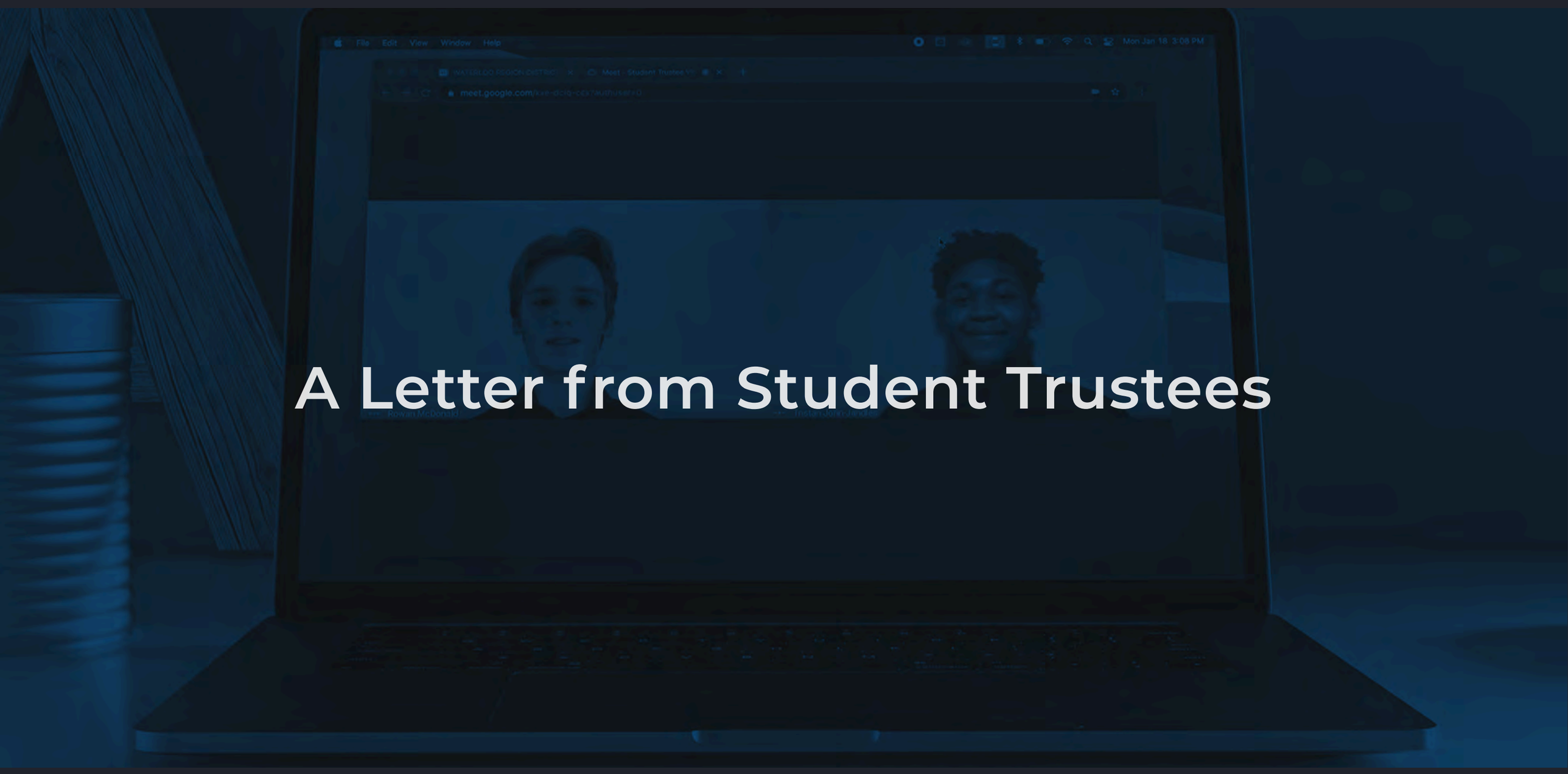


Supporting Staff Wellness and Learning at a Distance



Around the Clock Support Schools Can Count On – WRDSB 2020 Champions

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



A Letter from Student Trustees Tristan John-Jandles and Rowan McDonald



As Student Trustees, we would like to first recognize the challenging and unprecedented times we are living in. Waterloo Region District School Board staff, students, and families have displayed incredible resilience and quickly adapted to the many changes that have been asked of them during this pandemic. Our priority has been to continue to provide a voice at the Board table for students despite these difficulties.

Being the Student Trustees for the 2020-2021 school year, we have also had to adapt. We have been creative in our methods of connecting with our peers by hosting virtual Student Senate meetings and launching a new Student Trustee Instagram account – both of which are for and by students. These tools help us reach out to our peers to provide them with important information and gather their ideas, questions and concerns. Through these initiatives, our peers have told us that they want us to raise awareness of mental health resources, assist with strategies to connect our virtual learners, and incorporate social justice concerns in WRDSB decisions. We will continue to advocate and share these priorities at the Board table to assist Trustees and staff with their plans to support all students. We are committed to responding to every student who reaches out.

We look forward to continuing our work of making sure student voice is at the forefront of decisions made at the Board table and within the Committees where we are members. These include the Equity and Inclusion Advisory Group, the School Resource Officer review committee, the School Naming Review Committee, the Suspension Review committee, the French Immersion committee, and ultimately the Board of Trustees.

In 2020, we were forced to adapt beyond what we had imagined. In 2021, like all students we represent, we are eager to apply the skills of resilience, perseverance and patience in every possible way.

Tristan John-Jandles

WRDSB Student Trustee

Rowan McDonald

WRDSB Student Trustee

Our Stories



WRDSB Helps Launch Black History Month in Waterloo Region



Teaching, Learning and Feeding the Community in Blair



Marking Our Graduates Achievements in June 2020

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Our students are first – each and every one

Our students experience a sense of belonging in a caring and inclusive learning environment that addresses their well-being.

We are committed to honouring and respecting all of our students by creating an environment where they feel included, valued and treated with dignity. School-based safe caring and inclusive school teams support the promotion of a positive school climate within our schools and community.

You can see examples of this throughout the WRDSB, such as the work Amanpreet Dhaul is doing at Elgin Street Public School in Cambridge. Dhaul's efforts have highlighted the contributions of all people in Canada's history, and have helped to ensure the school is a welcoming place for all those who work and learn there.



Being an Equity Champion at Elgin Street PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions

Our students pursue individual learning pathways that reflect their interests, develop skills for the future and inspire global citizenship.

We believe that schools and staff have an important role to play in innovating the future through the way we are educating our students today. The future is full of new possibilities and advancements, and we want to ensure that our students are prepared for the realities of what the workforce and our world may look like after they graduate. We want to support students in developing critical thinking and independent learning skills that prepare them for their futures.

Vicki Page, a Hairstyling and Aesthetics teacher at Glenview Park Secondary School in Cambridge, reimagined her teaching as schools closed in March 2020 in response to COVID-19, but remained focused on equipping her students with the skills to succeed. This included incorporating a new industry-leading health and safety certification from Barbicide into each of her courses, helping prepare her students for the future.



Hairstyling and Aesthetics – Connecting from a Distance

Our students succeed in reaching their potiential and graduating for WRDSB High Schools and Programs.

Through the introduction of new technology, special programming and customized support, we build students' confidence as they face the future. It is important to us that every student experiences a caring learning environment that encourages their success. When a student's optimal learning potential is affected by behavioural, communicative, intellectual or physical exceptionalities, special education support is provided.

Even though we couldn't come together to celebrate our graduates in the typical ways, we made sure they knew we were no less proud of their incredible achievements. In June 2020, we plastered Waterloo Region with our congratulations for our 2020 graduates. From billboards, to the radio, to the newspaper – our message was everywhere.

In the fall of 2020, our students and their families were invited to take part in virtual graduation ceremonies, customized for each of our 16 secondary schools. Each of our 4,216 secondary graduates was recognized at the ceremonies, which when completed, took up 1.6 terabytes, or more than 1600 gigabytes, is akin to that of a major motion picture.

From across our district, the WRDSB came together to celebrate our secondary graduates virtually – each and every one.



Celebrating Our Graduates in the Time of COVID-19



Marking Our Graduates Achievements in June 2020

Our culture of innovation builds students' confidence and success as they face the future

Our learning environments include all students and their diverse perspectives and ideas

We celebrate the contributions from our diverse community of staff and students. Supporting these perspectives in our schools is an important part of student achievement and well-being.

Our Equity and Inclusion Policy underscores our commitment to providing inclusive programs, curriculum and services. We strive to create an environment for our students and staff that values independence, dignity, inclusiveness and respect. We are continually making improvements to remove barriers in our schools so that all students and staff experience a sense of belonging.

Even as our system managed the unprecedented shift to distance learning in March 2020, these goals remained at the forefront of our work, ensuring that all students and staff had the support they needed to continue to learn and work. The efforts of Kimiko Shibata, an English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD), Itinerant Resource T eacher, exemplifies this focus.

During the closure of schools in March, the need for extra supports became especially clear. Quickly seeing the need, Shibata helped to deliver essential items to families in need, such as food, clothing, school supplies, books, passwords and login information or health care and mental health resources – all in the family's first language through the help of interpreters.

"The pandemic has shown us the inequities and that the most vulnerable people continue to be our most vulnerable," Shibata explained. "The best thing we have done as a Board once we reopened was taking that first week of school to connect with families – to figure out who needs a device, who needs internet, who needs care – that proactive communication and outreach was so important."



Supporting Every Student in the Move to Distance Learning

Our students, staff and community are supported by creative and collaborative problem-solving.

Whether it is high tech innovation, or social innovation that is changing our society and communities to become better places to live, work and raise a family – we know our purpose as a public school district is to inspire our students to see the potential in themselves to contribute in a meaningful way to their community.

Students at Waterloo Collegiate Institute (WCI) in Waterloo found an innovative way to support their community and bring the school closer together, while respecting health and safety guidelines through the organization of a walk-a-thon.

In October 2020, Walk for Hope at WCI invited students to walk the 9,731 km distance from WCI to Syria in an effort to raise the money needed to sponsor the reunification of a refugee family. The parents and three daughters are safe in Canada, but two of their brothers are in dangerous conditions overseas. They exceeded their expectations, and raised an incredible $15,637.05 to support the effort to reunite this family.



Walking for Hope at Waterloo Collegiate Institute

Our school communities are encouraged to learn by exploring new and innovative projects, ideas and approaches.

From Kindergarten through to Grade 12, we are innovating the way we teach and learn, so that our students can become the next generation of innovators. We foster a culture where new ideas are welcomed and considered. We want to build our student's capacity to think critically and problem-solve creatively.

Our staff leads by example when it comes to innovating, and this was easier to see in 2020 than ever before. Shawn Boyes, a construction technology teacher at Huron Heights Secondary School in Kitchener, demonstrated this in the days following emergency school closures.

Traditional tech and trades are difficult to imagine being taught remotely, but Boyes has used this opportunity to reinvent the way he delivers the essential learnings while keeping it timely and fun. He kept students engaged by posting varied lessons for them to try at home, such as the task of planning out which tools they would purchase to outfit themselves in the real-world.

"The same learning opportunities are available," said Boyes. "It's just a different landscape."



Construction Technology – Connecting from a Distance

Our staff, families and caregivers are partners in every student's learning journey

Our families and caregivers are supported in creating the best possible outcomes for our students

We know that our families are partners with us in every student's learning journey, and we are committed to providing them the resources they need to support their children. As we prepared to return to school in September 2020, we knew that families would benefit from assistance helping to guide their children back to school, and ease their worries in this transition.

WRDSB Psychological Services created a series of guides, including The Caregivers' Guide to Setting the Stage for Return to School, designed to help caregivers support and communicate with their children in ways that help them feel calm and secure as they return to school. Shifting from the summer break to the school routine is often difficult, but this year was especially so given the length of time students spent away from school.



Supporting Student Well-being for the Return to School

Our staff is equipped with the skills and resources to support every child in their learning journey.

By embracing an attitude of care and support, we seek to understand and meet the needs of those who we serve. Through reaching out and listening to our community, families and educators, we build collaborative relationships to achieve common goals. Our staff is committed to working collaboratively to advance student achievement in the classroom.

In 2020, supporting student achievement meant also ensuring the health and safety of our students and staff. These efforts are largely thanks to the work of Superintendent of Student Achievement Bill Lemon, who led the responses to cases of COVID-19 our schools and workplaces. Working in close collaboration with Region of Waterloo Public Health, Lemon supports staff as they work to ensure families are notified, schools are cleaned and that learning can continue in a safe environment.

"When I became a superintendent, I never expected to manage this type of work," said Lemon. "I have learned a whole new language and got to work with some incredible people at Region of Waterloo Public Health."



Around the Clock Support Schools Can Count On – WRDSB 2020 Champions

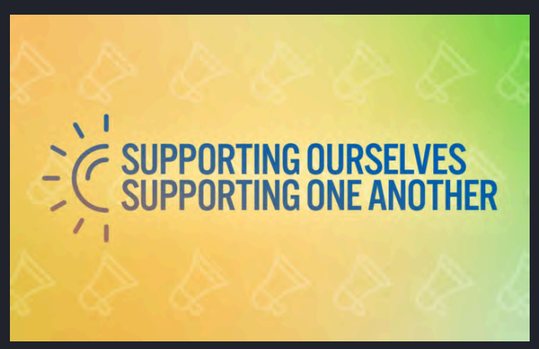
Our staff is supported in their wellness as they promote and model wellness for our students

Every student is entitled to beneficial learning environments. We know that students succeed when they feel safe and supported in school. A healthy school climate leads to greater student success. That is why we embrace an attitude of care and support, especially when it comes to our students and staff.

We know that in order to provide support and care for our students, our staff needs to feel supported and cared for, as well. In the wake of emergency school closures in March 2020, we knew that supporting staff mental health and well-being would be critical during this challenging time. Amongst existing staff wellness strategies, we launched Supporting Ourselves, Supporting One Another – a publication designed to offer resources and supports for staff.

Early editions included information on a range of topics, from how to create an ergonomic and safe at-home work environment, to addressing the anxiety that many feel during a global pandemic. Nancy Carse, Manager of Employee Wellness, explained that the publication has allowed staff to access a wide variety of mental health and well-being supports in one place.

“Rather than a flurry of different resources, we’re able to collect them all in one place,” said Carse. “It makes this information a lot more accessible and useful for our staff.”



Supporting Staff Wellness and Learning at a Distance

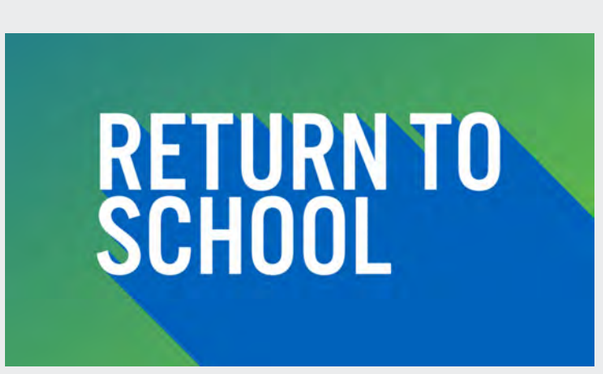
Our Stories



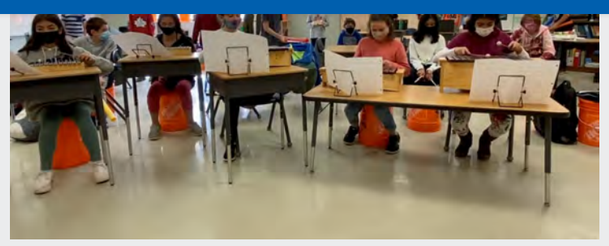
Freezin’ for a Reason at the Polar Plunge



Feeding Students in the Time of COVID-19



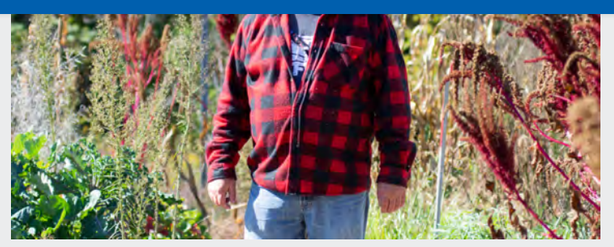
Supporting Student Well-being for the Return to School



Keeping the Music Alive at Millen Woods PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions



WRDSB Helps Launch Black History Month in Waterloo Region



Teaching, Learning and Feeding the Community in Blair



Operational Goals

Mathematics

Increase the percentage of students achieving at provincial standard by 8 per cent yearly on grade 3, grade 6 and grade 9 applied EQAO mathematics assessments for three years.

We believe mathematics is an essential skill vital to our students' future successes. Through a variety of tools and teaching approaches, our teachers encourage students as they develop a deep understanding of math. Many of the strategies we have identified to support this goal are already well underway. See how far we have progressed on each of our goals.

Our focus on mathematics has not wavered in the face of unprecedented challenges to public education as a result of a global pandemic. Our educators continue to innovate and inspire when it comes to developing our students' understanding of mathematics. We have highlighted the work of Aleda Klassen and Andrea Teichroeb, two math teachers who are innovating and adapting their approaches, with the support of their colleagues, to continue to inspire an interest in mathematics for our students.



Inspiring an Interest in Math, Even From a Distance

Graduation Rates

Within 3 years we will increase our five-year graduation rate by 5 per cent through the implementation of an evidence-based K-12 strategy.

We want to support every student in reaching their potential and graduating. This support is being offered in many ways to meet a student's individual learning needs. We have developed several strategies that are now in place to continue to improve our graduation rates.

In our video series, Connecting from a Distance, we heard from a number of educators who had adapted their teaching strategies following school closures in March 2020 to keep their students engaged in learning. From construction technology, to hairstyling and aesthetics, educators innovated to continue teaching and keep their students interested.

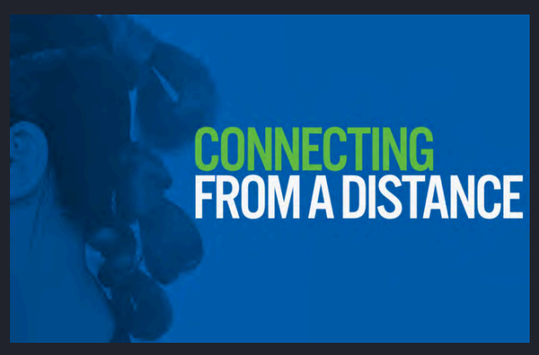
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From across our district, the WRDSB came together to celebrate our secondary graduates virtually – each and every one.



Celebrating Our Graduates in the Time of COVID-19



Hairstyling and Aesthetics – Connecting from a Distance



Construction Technology – Connecting from a Distance



Marking Our Graduates Achievements in June 2020

Well-Being

All students and staff will be supported and affirmed in the areas of cognitive, emotional, social and physical well-being with the acknowledgement of how these contribute to self and spiritual well-being.

We believe that a collaborative approach is needed to provide positive learning environments for all students. Our staff, families and caregivers are partners in every student's learning journey. We have implemented strategies that support the well-being of all of our partners.

We embrace an attitude of care and support when it comes to our students and staff. In February, our staff helped to kick off Black History Month at the Waterloo Region Museum with members of the community and the senior team took part in the Polar Plunge, raising money to support the Special Olympics athletes.

This commitment remained as we adapted our system to the realities of COVID-19. We prioritized student well-being in our return to school planning, providing a variety of resources developed by WRDSB Psychological Services for families to support their children in this transition. We also prioritized student nutrition by working with a number of local organizations to help get food to those who need it, while respecting the new health and safety guidelines.



Teaching, Learning and Feeding the Community in Blair



WRDSB Helps Launch Black History Month in Waterloo Region



Keeping the Music Alive at Millen Woods PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions



Supporting Student Well-being for the Return to School



Feeding Students in the Time of COVID-19



Freezin’ for a Reason at the Polar Plunge

Our Stories



Marking Our Graduates Achievements in June 2020

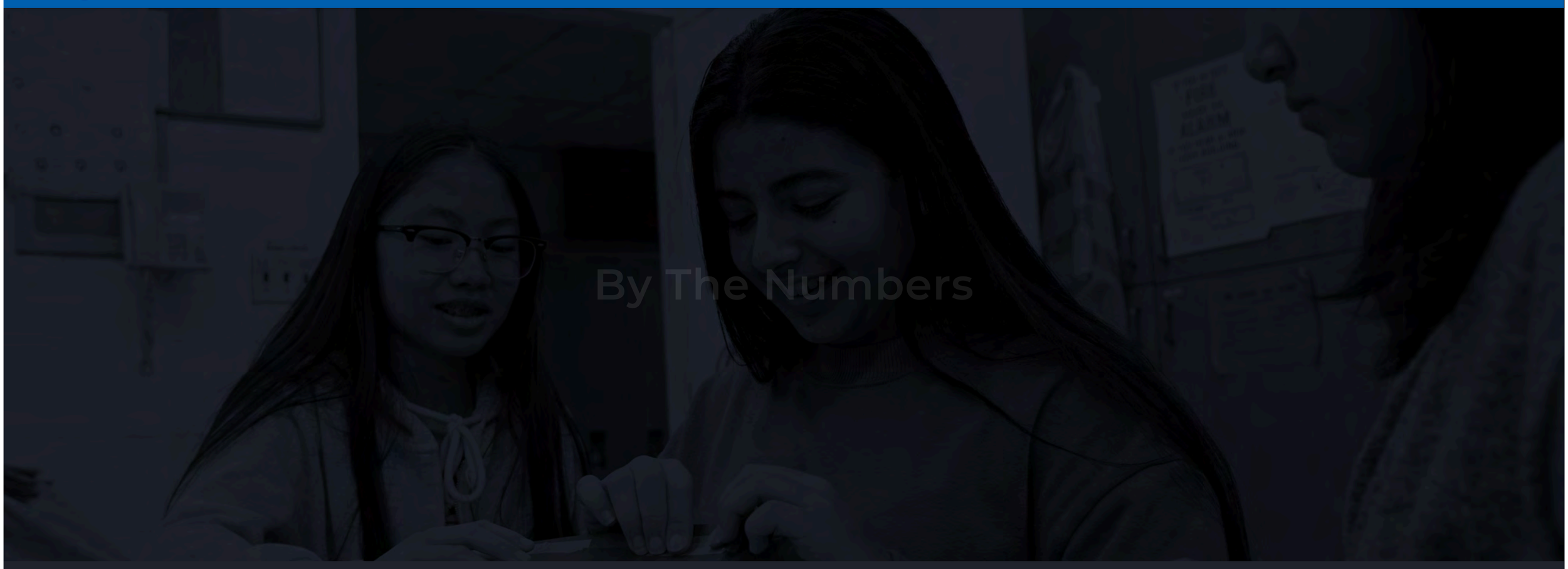


Construction Technology – Connecting from a Distance



Hairstyling and Aesthetics – Connecting from a Distance

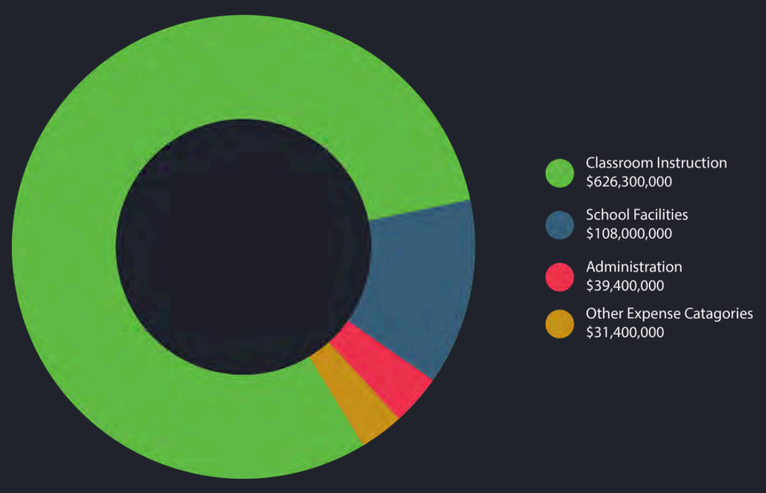
Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Trustees approve a budget to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic

On Monday, August 10, 2020, Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) trustees approved a budget comprising $805.1M in expenditures, with a capital budget of $70.4M for the 2020-21 school year.

Financial Services worked closely with departments to review budgets, making sure spending trends were analyzed and any necessary adjustments were made to reflect trends. The board benefitted from this review, ensuring we are well-positioned fiscally to address the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. The approved budget complies with provincial legislation, ensures the long-term fiscal stability of the board, and provides funding to support students and staff as they learn both in-person and at a distance.



Enrollment in WRDSB

64,179
Total Students

44,327
Elementary Students

19,852
Secondary Students

105
Elementary Schools

16
Secondary Schools

91%
% of Primary Classes at 20 or less

18,032
First Language is NOT the language of Instruction*

775
Self-Identified First Nation, Metis, and Inuit Students**

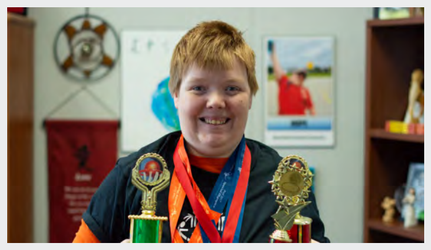
1,344
Extended Day Enrolment

* The Language first spoken at home other than English or French

** Only those that volunteer this information are counted

The WRDSB serves a population of approximately 535,154 (2016 census)

Our Stories



Freezin' for a Reason at the Polar Plunge



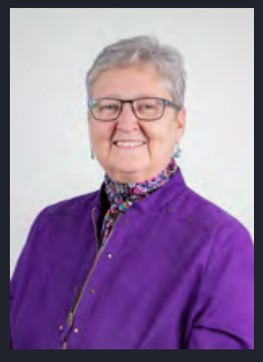
Feeding Students in the Time of COVID-19



Supporting Student Well-being for the Return to School

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020

WRDSB Trustees



Jayne Herring

ROLE: Chairperson
MUNICIPALITY: Cambridge / North Dumfries
PHONE: 519-240-3613
EMAIL: jayne_herring@wrdsb.ca

I am very honoured to have been elected by my colleagues to serve as Chairperson of the Board. I am grateful for this leadership opportunity and I look forward to working with the Board of Trustees in support of quality public education and the Board's Strategic Plan and Operational Goals. It was my pleasure to have worked for the WRDSB for 31 years retiring in November 2017. I was employed as a Secretary to the Superintendent of Schools, the Office Manager at Glenview Park Secondary School and finally as Manager of Corporate Services. I am proud to be the first support staff member to be elected as a WRDSB Trustee and now Chairperson of the Board.

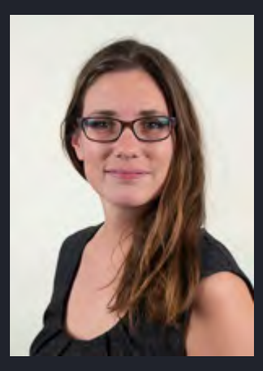
One of my goals is to meet and visit students and staff in their schools and I hope to have the opportunity to visit all schools in Cambridge and North Dumfries.I will be using social media as a tool to communicate and update parents and the community and I look forward to hearing from you. Please follow me on Twitter @CambridgeJayne, on Facebook as Trustee Jayne Herring, or at the email and phone numbers provided above.



Joanne Weston

ROLE: Vice-Chairperson
MUNICIPALITY: Kitchener
PHONE: 226-752-7781
EMAIL: joanne_weston@wrdsb.ca

It is my privilege and honour to serve as one of your Trustees on the Waterloo Region District School Board. I am the mother of a current WRDSB student and two recent graduates. I have lived, worked and volunteered in Waterloo Region for 25 years: currently residing in Kitchener and working in the post-secondary education sector. Prior to being elected as a Trustee, I was a long-serving WRDSB volunteer where I advocated for programs that support student achievement and wellbeing, equity, and parent engagement. I look forward to working with my fellow trustees, families, staff and the community to help our students reach their full potential.

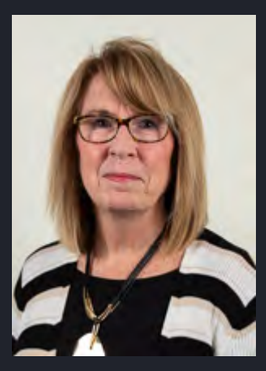


Karen Meissner

MUNICIPALITY: Woolwich / Wellesley
PHONE: 519-591-2825
EMAIL: karen_meissner@wrdsb.ca

I am proud to serve the Woolwich and Wellesley communities as your trustee at the Waterloo Region District School Board. It is my belief that students in the WRDSB deserve the best education and experience we can possibly give them. We need to not only provide education in core subjects, but teach them to better understand the world around them. They deserve a safe and inclusive environment to learn, and access to every resource we can offer. As an active member of my children's school council and regular classroom volunteer, I see teachers, staff and students working together. I see occasional struggles and I see inspiring moments. I'm both a fundraiser and volunteer for Kate's Kause – a charitable organization committed to Angelman Syndrome awareness and inclusive community projects. I am the proud aunt of Kate, who inspires me with her strength, voice, and her focus on enjoying life - something we all could use more of. I'm a regular volunteer with The Business Education Partnership, KW Multicultural Centre and a member of Equal Voice Waterloo Region.

I'm a small business owner in Elmira where I live with my family. I work as a professional photographer and I photograph children and the people who love them. I also collaborate with small businesses to create photographs that connect with their customers. In my free time, I enjoy cycling, reading, and meeting & collaborating with new people. I love spending time with my husband and three children. We enjoy getting muddy on outdoor adventures, riding our bikes in the beautiful, rural communities of Woolwich and Wellesley, and watching movies together while cuddling in our pyjamas.



Carol Millar

MUNICIPALITY: Waterloo / Wilmot
PHONE: 519-635-9257
EMAIL: carol_millar@wrdsb.ca

I am proud and excited to be representing Waterloo/Wilmot as a School Board Trustee for a second term. I am a retired Public Health Nurse who has had the pleasure of working in our schools as a school nurse for over 30 years. I am a graduate of the Waterloo Region District School Board as are my husband and children. I then graduated from UWO with my Bachelor of Science in Nursing. As my children were attending school, I was an involved member of their school councils as well as WRAPSC.

I am passionate about and value education, educators, youth and my community. In my first term as a Trustee, I focused my attention on Student Voice, Equity and Inclusion, Student and Staff Wellness as well assisting parents in navigating our school system. I will continue to listen and represent the community and advocate for the issues and concerns that are brought to my attention.

As a Trustee, I cannot act alone. The board must work together as a team and I commit to lead by example with open communication, collaboration and adaptability with the clear goal of always putting students first. I am someone who is open to new insights, learning and ideas. I promise to be prepared for what this job entails and to listen without judgment or bias.



Scott Piatkowski

MUNICIPALITY: Waterloo / Wilmot
PHONE: 519-577-2554
EMAIL: scott_piatkowski@wrdsb.ca

I am honoured to have been chosen by the voters of Waterloo and Wilmot Township to represent them on the Waterloo Region District School Board. I'm very excited about this new role.

I'm a proud graduate of both Eastwood Collegiate and Wilfrid Laurier University, the proud parent of two KCI graduates, and the proud step-parent of two current KCI students.

In my professional life, I manage a non-profit housing co-operative and also provide education to co-op Boards on sound management and governance. I'm a member of the National Board of Directors for the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada (CHF) and have served as a volunteer facilitator with the Co-operative Young Leaders program (CYL).

I'm also a former:

- Chair of both the City of Waterloo's Environmental Advisory Committee and the Waterloo Region Cycling Advisory Committee
- Member of both the Community Grants Review Committee and Local Environmental Action Fund (LEAF) for the City of Kitchener.
- President of the AIDS Committee of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo and Area (ACCKWA)
- Chair of the Board for the Wilfrid Laurier University Students' Union (WLUSU)
- Minor soccer coach (for 14 years)
- Weekly columnist for The Waterloo Chronicle and other local papers

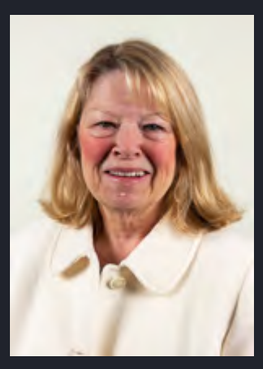
Feel free to follow me on Twitter @ScottPiatkowski, on Facebook as Scott Piatkowski, WRDSB Trustee, or at the email and phone numbers provided above.



Mike Ramsay

MUNICIPALITY: Kitchener
PHONE: 519-502-8449
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I have served as a Trustee since 1989, not because of what I could gain but for what I could give. Having served the Canadian public for over 35 years as a soldier, police officer, public servant, trustee and a community volunteer, I have gained a variety of valuable knowledge and experience that I believe helps me to make sound decisions as a trustee. My story is not uncommon. I immigrated to Canada in my early teens and soon found myself living on my own while trying to get an education and make something of myself. The dedicated staff of Kitchener Collegiate Institute invested in me and this helped form the foundation for my successes in life. They put my interests ahead of their own and taught me that it was my responsibility to pay it forward. That's why I serve you as a trustee. While I always aim to strike a balance that meets everyone's needs, student and public interest are my priority governing all of my decisions as a trustee. The decisions made by trustees today can affect an entire generation; they need to be the right decisions for the right reasons.



Kathi Smith

MUNICIPALITY: Kitchener
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I am a passionate advocate for children and youth and for their parents. This is what brought me to my involvement with public education even before I was a trustee. We have a responsibility as a society to provide each student with an excellent education to assist them to be the best that they can be. Trustees are the local connection to speak up for the students in their community and challenge the provincial government to remember we are here for kids. We are fortunate to have outstanding and committed staff who provide quality education to our students. Our challenge is to make sure that we represent the community in which we live – we need to inspire entrepreneurship and innovation; be equitable and inclusionary in all that we do. We always have to strive to be better, do better so that we provide the very best education to each and every student.



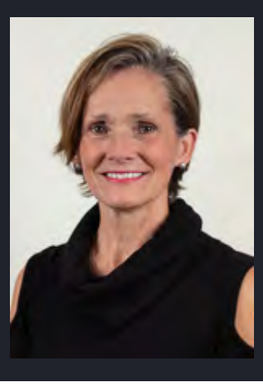
Laurie Tremble

MUNICIPALITY: Kitchener
PHONE: 519-503-1051
EMAIL: laurie_tremble@wrdsb.ca

I would like to thank the Kitchener community and my fellow trustees for their support and look forward to working with them to support each and every student in the WRDSB. I am passionate about public education. I believe all children have the right to learn and reach their full potential in a safe, caring environment and I believe that staff, families and the community are an integral part of student success and well-being.

I was born and raised in Kitchener and am a proud graduate of the WRDSB and Wilfrid Laurier University. I have two sons attending WRDSB schools. For over 10 years, I have been a committed volunteer with WRDSB schools, school councils and various board committees. I was proud to serve as the co-chair of the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) and the Waterloo Region Assembly of Public School Councils (WRAPSC) for a number of years.

My husband is a small-business owner in the community and also a native of Kitchener. After many years as a stay-at-home mom, I now work with my husband in his flooring business. In my spare time, I enjoy reading, spending time with family and friends, travelling and watching my boys play hockey.



Cindy Watson

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Crystal Whetham

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I believe in servant leadership and doing my best to “treat others the way I would like to be treated”. I consistently bring constituents concerns forward at the board table. As an elected representative I believe that it is a privilege and an honour to serve constituents. I am a strong advocate of student, parent and staff involvement and engagement. I support the use of surveys, focus groups and participation on committees which contribute to meaningful discussion and input. I believe boards make better policy when students, parents and staff are involved in the decisions making process.

According to the Education Act the board is responsible for the academic performance and well-being of students. Ultimate success is demonstrated by students who achieve their full potential, students with disabilities are given the best support, parents are treated as partners and encouraged to participate in their child’s education, and staff that have been given adequate resources and feel supported. When these are in alignment and unified everyone is successful, and students realize their full potential.

Boards that are progressive generate new and creative ideas and solutions by demonstrating a culture of freedom. Freedom that allows the sharing of different ideas and opinions in a respectful manner, realizing that “everyone” plays a part and no contribution is insignificant.



Kathleen Woodcock

MUNICIPALITY: Waterloo / Wilmot
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I am honoured to be elected for a fifth term as Trustee for Waterloo/Wilmot. During my years on the Board, I have actively participated as a member of a variety of standing, statutory and ad hoc committees including strategic planning, audit, agenda development, superintendent selection, school year calendar and fiscal review task force. I have served as WRDSB chair, vice-chair and past chair. I believe in putting students first and ensuring that schools provide a safe, inclusive learning environment so students can achieve their full potential. As the WRDSB continues to implement the strategic plan, I look forward to engaging with stakeholders on issues that impact our students and school communities. I believe in a strong public education system that is the cornerstone of democracy. I have experienced an excellent public education system, starting in a one-room schoolhouse many years ago. My children have also experienced and benefited from a public education. It is exciting to watch my grandchildren as they experience their public education. As a trustee, having the opportunity to be involved in the ongoing success of kids in Waterloo Region and to celebrate their achievements in school and in life allows me to give back to my community.

I have lived in Waterloo Region since 1975, the last 30+ years in Westvale. I am a graduate of WLU (MSW 2003, BA 1978) and a Registered Social Worker. I am employed in the Community Services Department with the City of Kitchener. I am an associate member of the Royal Canadian Legion, Branch 113, Dresden, an avid gardener, an ‘enthusiastic’ golfer, and a proud mother and grandmother.

My roots in Waterloo region run deep. I started my education at Silverheights Public SchI am honoured to be one of your elected trustees for Cambridge/North DumfriesMy roots in Waterloo region run deep. I started my education at Silverheights Public School, graduated from Jacob Hespeler Secondary School, and studied Broadcasting at Seneca College. My family history dates back over 200 years in Cambridge, which makes me extra proud to hold this position and help our littlest citizens flourish. I am a mother of two beautiful daughters who attend a local Cambridge school, and the youngest daughter of 7, which helps me to understand the large family dynamic. My first love will always be books with my favourite author being Wally Lamb. My other love is music. I am a classically trained Clarinetist and I hold my Grade 8 RCOM as well as Grade 4 in singing. I enjoy camping in the summer and getting back to basics in nature with a backpack, tent and the least of necessities.

I have spent my working career in the property management industry.

I am very excited for the next four years and the changes we will make as a board together to better our little citizen’s education.

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020

Around the Clock Support Schools Can Count On – WRDSB 2020 Champions



Around the Clock Support Schools Can Count On – WRDSB 2020 Champions

Whenever we experience a turbulent or uncertain time, we look for someone to ground us, steer, and guide us as we stay on course.

For the WRDSB, Bill Lemon has been the guiding force that has helped us navigate welcoming our students back safely and managing Covid-19.

Lemon, superintendent of student achievement and well-being, in addition to his regular portfolio that includes healthy schools, critical events response, and mental health, is the lead for managing Covid-19 cases in our schools.

"When I became a superintendent, I never expected to manage this type of work," said Lemon. [Editor's note: To be fair, no one ever expected they would be managing this kind of work.] With no training in community health or the medical field, Lemon's Kinesiology degree from 1991 is coming in handy. "I have learned a whole new language and got to work with some incredible people at Region of Waterloo Public Health."

The WRDSB has always had a strong partnership with Region of Waterloo Public Health, but COVID-19 has increased our cooperation and created stronger relationships. "Bill is a great champion for COVID-19 response with schools and tremendous support to Public Health efforts to manage COVID cases and prevent the spread," said Jessie Johal, manager of COVID-19 case and contact management at Public Health. "Bill has created a very streamlined approach of notification of cases to Public Health and actioning dismissals to ensure that once the case is reported, the outreach happens within 24 hours, and usually within hours."

COVID doesn't take a break at the end of the workday or on weekends, and neither does Bill Lemon. He organizes meetings with school administrators and necessary central staff at the WRDSB to review case details and outline the next steps, seven days a week. These steps include ensuring cleaning is coordinated, and families receive the necessary information they need.

While humbled to be named a WRDSB Champion, Lemon is quick to point out that he is not the only person that schools rely on when a COVID case is confirmed. "There are many people across our organization supporting this work," he says. "When we support a school dealing with a positive case or an outbreak, departments pull together to make the best of the situation."

Making the best of the situation is a quality that's needed when helping others through a potentially stressful time. Lemon's attitude and sense of humour have helped administrators and staff remain calm and feel reassured. The team at Public Health also appreciates Lemon's perspective, "His calm and responsive approach has been instrumental," said Johal. "Especially during surges when Public Health resources are not as available. He has been there to mobilize in different ways to support during a surge of cases. It feels like Bill is a part of the Public Health COVID-19 team. He pivots and rises to the occasion to ensure the health and well being of our school communities."

Through every case meeting and phone call, Lemon's priority remains our students' and staff's safety. "When you boil it down, this work is really about maintaining confidence in public education," he says. "Families need to be confident that our schools are safe."

"Every day, our administrators and staff are keeping our schools safe during a pandemic. Every day they are also providing a learning environment for our students," says Lemon. "Alone, these tasks are mighty, combined, they are heroic."

We can say the same about Bill Lemon.

Share This Story



Teaching, Learning and Feeding the Community in Blair



Marking Our Graduates Achievements in June 2020



Construction Technology – Connecting from a Distance

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Being an Equity Champion at Elgin Street PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions



Being an Equity Champion at Elgin Street PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions

During a time when our administrators have the added responsibility of keeping our students and staff safe during a pandemic, Amanpreet Dhaul, Vice-Principal at Elgin Street Public School in Cambridge, has continued to make her school a welcoming place for all. Her kind demeanour, professional leadership and personal connection caught the attention of newly welcomed Kindergarten teacher and WRDSB staff member Monisha Randhawa, who nominated her to be a WRDSB 2020 Champion.

“I couldn’t believe it,” said Dhaul of her nomination. “I saw the email and had to reread it. It made my day!”

“I felt so overjoyed and honoured because this has been an exceptionally challenging year,” shared Dhaul. Amidst the steep learning curve involved with being a new administrator, Dhaul has been recovering from a serious ACL injury while managing her responsibilities in various committees and initiatives.

But as a new educator entering the world of teaching in a less than normal environment, it was Randhawa who felt the impact of her administrator the most, even before the school year began.

“I haven’t known her for very long because she hired over the summer for my current Long-Term Occasional (LTO) Teacher position,” Randhawa explained. “When I first came to the school, she right away gave me the support I needed and made me feel very much part of the school.”

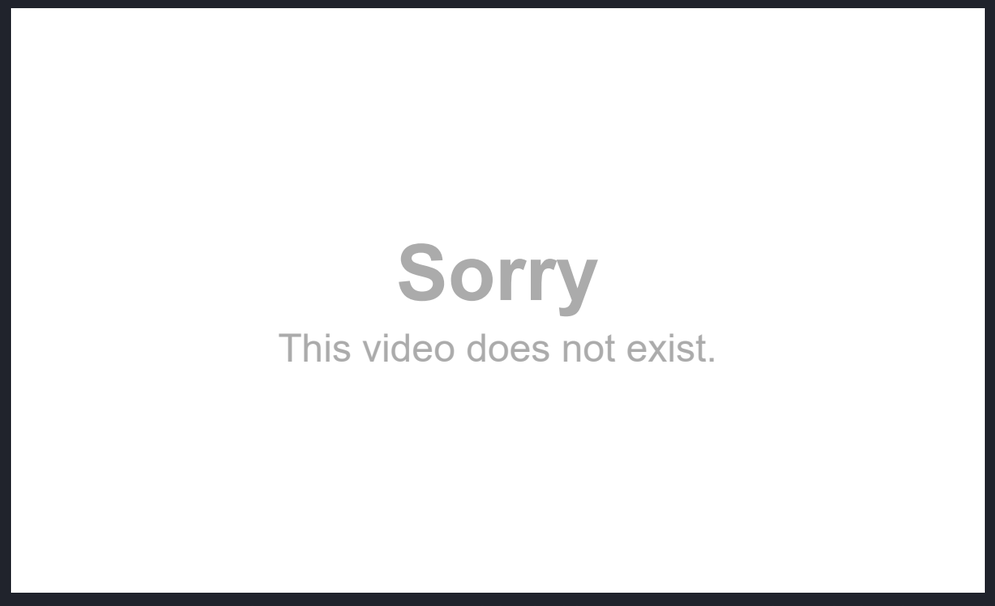
When Randhawa was going through the summer interview process for the first time, Dhaul had the opportunity to interview her. Unsuccessful at her first attempt, Dhaul connected with Randhawa to

provide her with interview feedback and advice for professional growth.

“She made sure we had a Google Meet about how to improve my interview skills. She has so much faith in me for my future,” said Randhawa. Dhaul’s commitment to supporting new teachers, such as Randhawa, is part of her commitment to the mentorship of Indigenous and racialized educators.

“She is always asking me, ‘how are you doing,’” shared Randhawa. “‘How are you feeling fitting in?’ and ‘are you seeing anything that needs to be changed?’ She values my opinion.”

During their conversations, they both felt the noticeable absence of Indigenous, Black and racialized staff within our board and representation in our system’s events and activities. When they saw the call-out for students and staff to submit user-generated content for the board’s Remembrance Day initiative, Dhaul saw an opportunity to contribute a piece and asked Randhawa to join her. This led to the co-creation of their documentary piece on Private Bukkan Singh, one of the first Sikh soldiers to serve Canada in WW1. Inspired by the incredible work from The Sikh Heritage Museum, Dhaul and Randhawa used their positions of power to honour this historical figure missing from the history books and conversations.



“This is what anti-racism and anti-oppression work looks like at WRDSB,” explained Dhaul. “We all need to do the hard work. Dig deep to find and share the life stories and contributions of marginalized people with our students.”

As Randhawa, too, reflects on the project, she shared that she would have never stepped out of her comfort zone, if it wasn’t for the encouragement and confidence her administrator gave her. “She has made me feel like I could be a leader. I can make change!”

It is obvious that Dhaul is passionate about anti-racism work at WRDSB. Since becoming an administrator in 2019, she has led the Equity Team and Truth & Reconciliation Committee at Elgin Street PS.

Randhawa recounts, “from the time I started, she encouraged me to get involved in different things that [were] going on around the school, and has made me feel very much part of this school community. She asked me to join the Truth and Reconciliation committee because she valued my past experience with the Simcoe County DSB.”

As a young minority leader, Dhaul has big plans for the future! The work she is doing to challenge the status-quo is inspiring not only to her staff, but her peers around the board.

“I believe that our purpose as educational leaders is to ensure that our students see all facets of their intersectional identities reflected in their learning and within their learning environment,” Dhaul shares.

For the past three years, she has been working closely with other WRDSB minority leaders on a project called Aspiring Teachers Camp. The goal is to inspire Indigenous, Black and racialized youth to pursue a career in the educational workforce with the WRDSB.

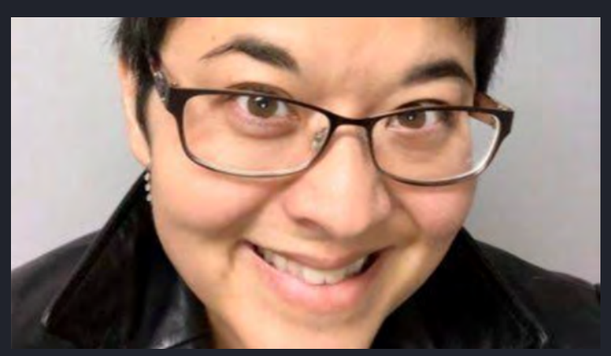
Randhawa hasn’t told her this yet, but “being around her makes me want to be a vice-principal, too! She has given me so much confidence to strive for bigger things.”

“She cares so deeply about her school, her students, and her staff.” Randhawa adds, “and that is why I nominated her as a WRDSB champion.”

Share This Story







Around the Clock Support Schools Can Count On – WRDSB 2020 Champions

Walking for Hope at Waterloo Collegiate Institute

Supporting Every Student in the Move to Distance Learning

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020

Celebrating Our Graduates in the Time of COVID-19



Celebrating Our Graduates in the Time of COVID-19

Graduating from secondary school has always represented a milestone achievement. The culmination of more than a decade of learning, growing and hard work in pursuit of personal growth and accomplishment. In the time of a global pandemic, taking time to recognize and celebrate graduates in the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) is more important than ever before.

With this in mind, in the Fall of 2020, staff from across the WRDSB came together to help create virtual Commencement ceremonies, customized for each of our 16 secondary schools. These replicate the experience of an in-person graduation ceremony, while prioritizing the health and safety of students, staff and families.

Ben Jaklic and Kylie Penticost, both Communications Officers in the Communications Department, have spearheaded this effort coordinating this board-wide initiative. Jaklic, a creative specialist, created custom video templates and motion graphics for the commencement videos, while Penticost has been helping secondary school staff collect the necessary resources, such as student photos and video messages, along with organizing the logistics of the board-wide graduation celebration.

The experience is not only a virtual one. Graduates were offered the chance to purchase a Graduation Souvenir Package, which includes a gown, cap, tassel and year charm in school colours, in addition to the physical diplomas each graduate received. Students, staff and families were invited to share in one magical grad night, across the WRDSB, on Friday, November 27. Each graduating student received customized login information to access their own school's event.

The scale of the task at hand becomes clear when contemplating that each of the 16 videos Jaklic has built and edited, features the names and photographs of each of our 4,216 secondary graduates. That works out to 230 hours spent editing, rendering, exporting and uploading the final products, so that our students, staff and families can celebrate the accomplishments of our WRDSB graduates. The file size for the project, clocking in at more than 1.6 terabytes, or more than 1600 gigabytes, is akin to that of a major motion picture.

Jaklic's dedication to getting the job done has meant long hours, working into the nights and on weekends, to help ensure WRDSB grads each have a memorable experience to mark the milestone. For him, there's no question that the effort is well spent.

"It's worth it," said Jaklic. "It means that, despite COVID, our graduates will have something to look back on when they're remembering their time in the WRDSB. How they made it to this point, even with the added challenges of the pandemic."

For Penticost, this project hits close to home. As a graduate of Forest Heights Collegiate Institute, and with a husband who is a secondary guidance counsellor, she knows just how much celebrating this achievement means for students and staff alike.

"I remember the pride and excitement that my peers and I felt reaching that milestone," said Penticost. "It's so much more than just receiving your diploma. It's the sum of your learning journey up until this point. It has been an honour to work on such an important project. I cannot thank all the secondary school staff enough for all their hard work and time they, too, have put into this special celebration."

From across our district, the WRDSB came together to celebrate our secondary graduates virtually – each and every one.

Share This Story



Being an Equity Champion at Elgin Street PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions



Freezin' for a Reason at the Polar Plunge

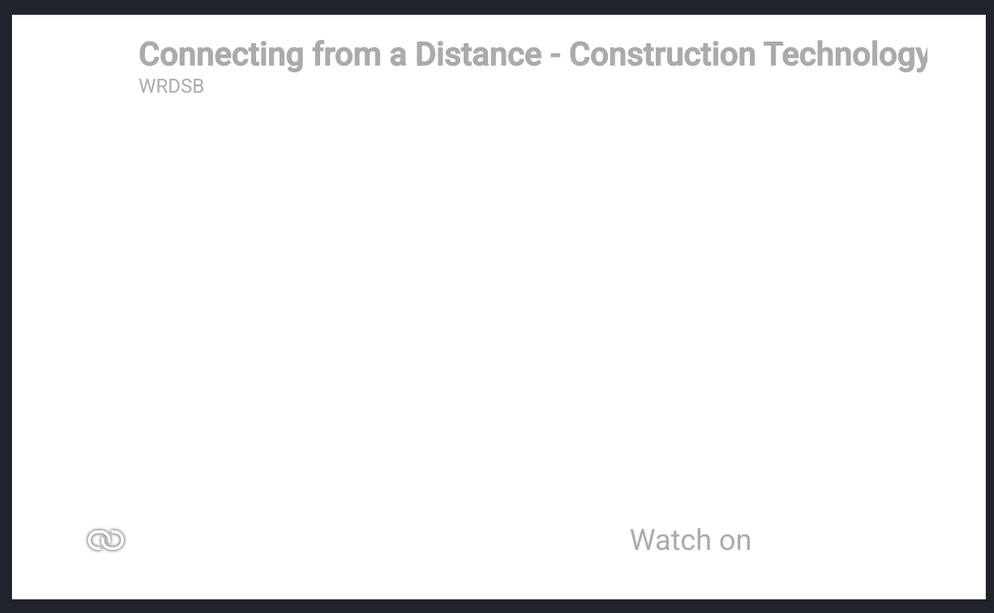


Feeding Students in the Time of COVID-19

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Construction Technology – Connecting from a Distance



Construction Technology | Connecting from a Distance

Following the March 13 emergency closure of schools, staff worked swiftly to move our entire system online with unprecedented speed and dedication. To help tell these incredible stories, the Connecting from a Distance video series was launched. In each video, Kylie Penticost, Communications Officer, speaks with a WRDSB educator to see how they have adapted their teaching and learning environments to remote realities.

In this video, Penticost speaks with Shawn Boyes, a construction technology teacher at Huron Heights Secondary School in Kitchener.

Boyes shares how he has shifted a traditional hands-on, in-class course to allow his students to do, see and explore, safely, in their own homes. He kept students engaged by posting varied lessons for them to try at home, such as the task of planning out which tools they would purchase to outfit themselves in the real-world.

“The same learning opportunities are available,” said Boyes. “It’s just a different landscape.”

Traditional tech and trades are difficult to imagine being taught remotely, but Boyes has used this opportunity to reinvent the way he delivers the essential learnings while keeping it timely and fun.



WRDSB Helps Launch Black History Month in Waterloo Region



Teaching, Learning and Feeding the Community in Blair



Marking Our Graduates Achievements in June 2020



Feeding Students in the Time of COVID-19



Feeding Students in the Time of COVID-19

Helping hands were busy across Waterloo Region as volunteers with Nutrition for Learning prepared food packages for delivery to schools throughout the region. The charity has rapidly reimagined its operations at least twice in response to COVID-19. In March 2020, they reacted to emergency school closures by offering pop-up service at schools throughout the region, and as students returned to in-person learning, they adapted again by providing in-school nutrition with pre-bagged non-perishable options.

Brian Banks heads up Community and Partnership Development at Nutrition for Learning and explained that “it’s work to be able to serve,” but that the results are worth the effort. Shifting their operations to produce and package nutritional offerings centrally was challenging, but addressing the needs of students is the ultimate motivator. There was never really any question of if they would continue.

“Those who would normally rely on the programs are still there,” said Banks. “This is something that has to happen.”

Like school itself, the items students received looked a bit different this year. On this day at the Nutrition for Learning Volunteer Bagging Station at the Schwaben Club in Kitchener, volunteers were combining individually sealed bags of cereal, granola bars, crackers and applesauce. Crucially, these items are carefully selected to maintain strict nutritional guidelines, such as limitations on sugar content. They are also non-perishable which means they can be on-hand at schools to be used as

needed. Banks explained they are planning on providing more dairy, fruit and vegetable options, but the logistics of doing so given COVID-19 protocols is more challenging.

“We are all moving forward in a positive way,” said Banks. “We’re going to work through this; we’ll make it together.”

None of this would be possible without the generous support of volunteers, explained Tania Moser, who leads Program Support and Development at Nutrition for Learning. Volunteers have always played a critical role in the delivery of service for Nutrition for Learning and this is one thing that has not changed. Volunteers are responsible for packaging the food into individual bags, and as such, new guidelines have been put in place to help mitigate the risks associated with COVID-19.

When volunteers arrive each day, Moser explained, they are required to fill out a screening questionnaire, and have their temperature taken with a contactless thermometer. If they answer yes to any of the questions, or if their temperature is over a certain threshold, they are asked to visit their family physician before returning.

Volunteers wear masks and work at their own stations, more than two metres from their fellow volunteers. Hand sanitizer is plentiful and all of the packaged food is loaded into brand-new or reusable containers that can be cleaned and sanitized.

Ross Robertson is one of those volunteers. He first got involved as an Optimist Club member.

“The goal of ensuring kids have food so they can concentrate on learning instead of being distracted by their rumbling stomachs,” is what motivates Robertson.

He encourages anyone interested to take the first step to supporting Nutrition for Learning.

“There’s no better time, so get involved,” said Robertson. “Nutrition for Learning is just such a great organization and they do so much” for students and the community.

Each year, Nutrition for Learning provides universal access to nutrition programs in 99 Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) schools, explained Bill Lemon, Superintendent of Student Achievement and Well-being.

“The service they provide to our students and their families is instrumental in addressing food insecurity for our students and their families,” said Lemon.

The necessity of student nutrition programs has only increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, he added. Ensuring WRDSB students can access nutritious food during the school day, given the added restrictions of new health and safety protocols, is especially important.

The Waterloo Education Foundation Inc. (WEFI) helped to illustrate the important role Nutrition for Learning and other student nutrition organizations play with a $50,000 donation in April and an additional $30,000 in November.

Matthew Gerard, treasurer and secretary of WEFI, explained that this decision was an easy one, given the pandemic-related challenges faced by members of WRDSB school communities.

“Food insecurity is experienced by many families in Waterloo Region, and this issue has only been magnified by the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Gerard. “It’s our hope that our donations, as well as our continued support of nutrition programs, provides students and families with a measure of relief during a challenging time.”

Nutrition for Learning isn’t alone in their efforts to feed students. May Court Club of Kitchener-Waterloo’s Food Box Program provides a similar service to support student nutrition needs. Gaye Karges, Food Box Convenor, explained that they too have noticed an increased need. In the first two weeks of September alone they delivered 40 boxes to 26 schools, which marks a significant increase.

“There are many families who are struggling,” said Karges. “We are very happy to be able to help with that.”

Their operations have also adapted to COVID-19 health and safety requirements. Each one of the 15 volunteers dons a mask and sanitizes their hands before packaging or delivering the food. Deliveries are completed by drop-off to help ensure safe physical distancing, Karges explained.

The work of supporting students in their well-being and learning is at the heart of the goal of May Court Clubs across Ontario. First established in 1898 by Lady Aberdeen, Karges explained, these social clubs are focused on the importance of women’s role in society and the positive difference they can make for their community.

“The purpose of the Club is to assist individuals in the community with financial, educational and emotional support,” said Karges. “So the Food Box Program aligns perfectly.”

For Moser, the work of supporting student nutrition is personal and she knows, first-hand, the difference their efforts make in the lives of students and their families.

“As a mom, for me, knowing that food is accessible to my children is huge,” she said.

When asked how people can best support programs like Nutrition for Learning, Moser's answer was to the point.

"We need volunteers, and we need money. It's that simple."

How you can help

Nutrition for Learning

- Donate now
- Get involved

The May Court Club of Kitchener-Waterloo

- Donate now
- Visit their website

Waterloo Education Foundation Inc. (WEFI)

- Donate now

Share This Story



WRDSB Helps Launch Black History Month in Waterloo Region



Teaching, Learning and Feeding the Community in Blair



Marking Our Graduates Achievements in June 2020

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Freezin’ for a Reason at the Polar Plunge



Freezin’ for a Reason at the Polar Plunge

Spirits were high, even if the -7° celsius temperature outdoors wasn’t, as the brave participants at the Polar Plunge in Waterloo prepared to take a frigid dip. Director of Education John Bryant, Associate Director Lila Read, and Superintendents Scott Miller, Ron DeBoer, Elaine Ranney and Graham Shantz all volunteered to take the plunge in support of Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) students and Special Olympics athletes in February 2020.

The event, hosted by the Waterloo Regional Police Service (WRPS) in support of Special Olympics Ontario and the spring games coming to Waterloo Region this May, offered volunteers a refreshing plunge, in return for their fundraising efforts. In total, 112 participants raised $45,250 to support the athletes.

Scott Miller, superintendent of student achievement and well-being, spearheaded the WRDSB effort at the plunge and is a member of the local Special Olympics steering committee.

“When the opportunity arose to be a part of the leadership team bringing these games to Waterloo, it was an easy decision to take part,” said Miller.

Supporting the Special Olympics is nothing new, explained Miller, as an event is traditionally hosted annually at a local level, offering athletes with intellectual disabilities in Grades 7 through 12 the opportunity to take part. The chance to take part in the Polar Plunge is just another avenue to help promote the games, and get the community involved.

“We want to encourage our community to get engaged with the event,” said Miller. “It was an exciting way to bring everyone together.”

Miller was pleased to see the many community organizations represented at the plunge, including the KW Titans, the Laurier football team and Extend-A-Family, to name a few. For him, having a WRDSB presence at the plunge was important as it demonstrates a commitment to each and every student, while helping to shine a light on the opportunities that exist beyond school.

John Bryant, director of education, led the plungers into the icy waters and was happy to support an organization that creates opportunities for students and community members alike. He sees it as an example of the WRDSB working closely with their partners in Waterloo Region to support each and every one of our students.

“It’s good for our community, it’s good for our school system,” said Bryant. “It’s a lot of fun and a great event.”

While some may have been hoping for a warmer day for the plunge, Bryant was glad the weather was appropriately cold, as it meant the experience was as authentic and thrilling as he had hoped it would be.

“I was monitoring the weather throughout the week,” said Bryant. “I found out that Saturday was going to be the coldest day.”

The group, he explained, was spurred on by the greater cause they were supporting, rather than daunted by the task of jumping into the icy water. Bryant predicts the WRDSB contingent will only grow in the future, and he hopes it becomes a regular event for staff to support.

“I think it’s going to be an annual tradition,” said Bryant. “It’s so much more than just jumping in some water.”

Recruiting members of the senior team to take the plunge was easier than Miller had expected, with his fellow Superintendent Ron DeBoer eagerly signing up and getting the ball rolling. From there, the rest of the team joined on quickly, excited to support athletes and the community.

“It was great to have Director Bryant and Associate Director Read take part,” said Miller. “We believe in the opportunities for each and every student.”

“It was a really unique team-building opportunity,” said Miller, adding that he was especially grateful for all the members of the WRDSB team that took the plunge, and everyone who came out to cheer them on.

The day took a special turn for Associate Director Lila Read, who had a surprise reunion with a former student and Special Olympic athlete, Letisha Fay. Fay graduated from Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational School (KCI) in 2008, while Read was principal at the secondary school.

“Letisha would come and visit me every day,” said Read. “She was an amazing student leader.”

Fay, who still visits Read a few times each year, remembers her time at the school fondly – from playing on the basketball team, to winning the Principal’s Prize when she graduated.

Basketball continues to be a passion for Fay. Her dedication to the sport runs deep, even inspiring Fay to shovel the snow off her local basketball court in the winter, so she can practice.

Fay explained her favourite part of the Special Olympics is “being part of a team.” Apart from enjoying the game, the experience has allowed her to build strong relationships with her teammates, and build a network of supporters. She encourages anyone who is interested to get involved with the Special Olympics.

“I started with Special Olympics in 2008, after I graduated high school,” said Fay, who now plays for a basketball team based in Guelph. “It’s a team atmosphere and I have lots of friends in the Special Olympics now.”

Already looking forward to taking the plunge again next time, Read was grateful to have had the opportunities to support the shared goals of the WRDSB and Special Olympics Ontario by creating opportunities for success for every student and every person.

“It was a great day and a lot of fun,” said Read. “There’s no better way to spend a Saturday afternoon than supporting our students and athletes.”

Before she left, Fay was sure to invite her favourite principal out to watch her on the basketball court.

“Are you going to come watch?” asked Fay.

“Absolutely!” replied Read with a smile.

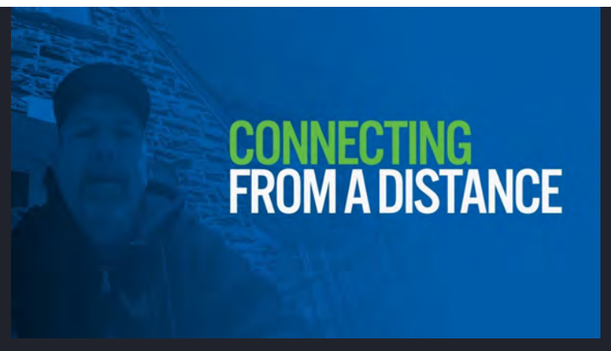
Share This Story



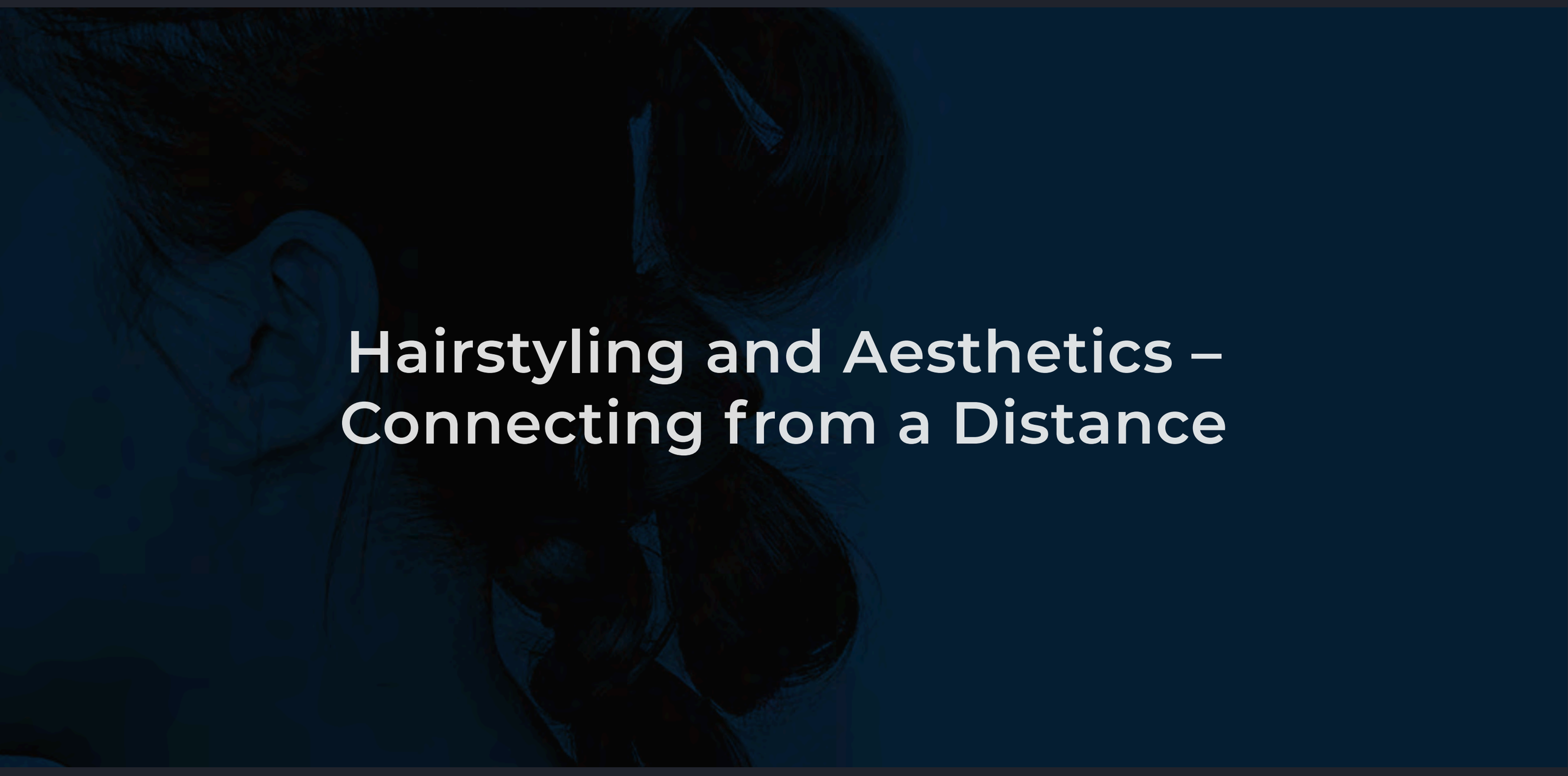
Teaching, Learning and Feeding the Community in Blair



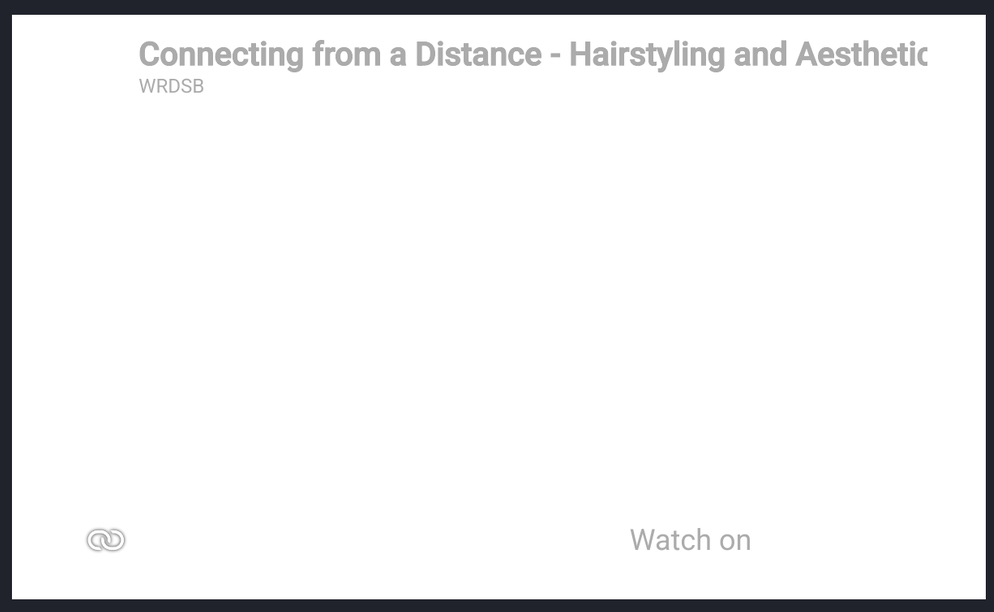
Marking Our Graduates Achievements in June 2020



Construction Technology – Connecting from a Distance



Hairstyling and Aesthetics – Connecting from a Distance



Hairstyling and Aesthetics | Connecting from a Distance

Following the March 13 emergency closure of schools, staff worked swiftly to move our entire system online with unprecedented speed and dedication. To help tell these incredible stories, the Connecting from a Distance video series was launched. In each video, Kylie Penticost, Communications Officer, speaks with a WRDSB educator to see how they have adapted their teaching and learning environments to remote realities.

In this video, Penticost speaks with Vicki Page, a Hairstyling and Aesthetics teacher at Glenview Park Secondary School in Cambridge.

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WRDSB Helps Launch Black History Month in Waterloo Region

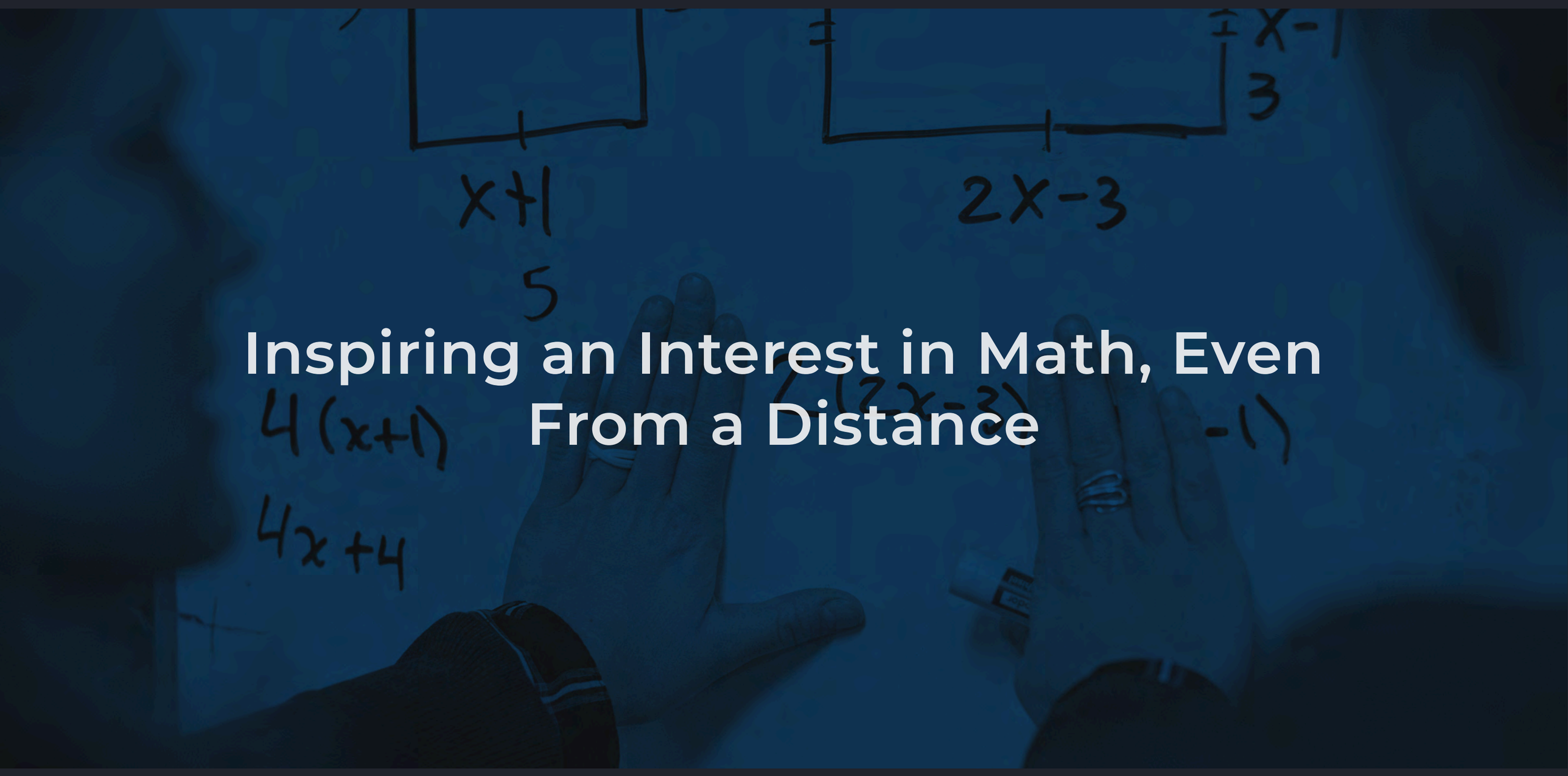


Teaching, Learning and Feeding the Community in Blair



Marking Our Graduates Achievements in June 2020

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Inspiring an Interest in Math, Even From a Distance



Inspiring an Interest in Math, Even From a Distance

Math educators across the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) remain focused on keeping their students interested and engaged, while adapting to the changing realities of the global pandemic. From emergency distance learning, to hybrid learning in the fall, to full distance learning once again, they continue to demonstrate flexibility and determination when it comes to inspiring an interest in mathematics.

Aleda Klassen, a math teacher at Waterloo Collegiate Institute (WCI) in Waterloo, is one of those educators. Her teaching focus has always been on encouraging students to come up with their own ideas and solutions, and letting their thinking guide the learning.

“I like to have a lot of discussion, I like to have ideas come from students,” said Klassen. “I like to give them problems and let them explore, and come up with their own observations or realizations.”

During the period of hybrid learning for secondary students in the fall, Klassen was focused on adapting her classroom environment, both in-person and online, to maintain this conversation and engagement. Of course, the challenge was doing this with only half of the class in front of her in the classroom.

Klassen is no stranger to employing technology in her teaching, and this served her well in adapting to hybrid learning. Through the use of an iPad, she was able to help bridge the gap between those

students who were in-person and those online.

“I would project from my iPad, so I could do the things that I would normally do,” said Klassen. “Like, take pictures of their work and add them to our slideshow for discussion.”

By having the iPad microphone on as she taught, it also allowed students at home to listen in to the discussion in class, and the speaker on the iPad allowed them to chime in if they had questions or an answer to offer.

Whiteboards play a key role in Klassen’s classroom, as they allow students to work without fear of making mistakes as they go. The desks in her classroom are topped with whiteboards, and whiteboards cover the walls of the classroom. With the focus of maintaining these stress-free worksurfaces, she sent home each student with a small whiteboard of their own, allowing them to continue working in a familiar manner while remote.

With the move to full-distance learning following the winter break, Klassen has faced new challenges with maintaining the flow of learning in her classroom.

“One of the biggest challenges for me has been finding ways to see what they’re doing,” she said. “That’s a big part of the way I teach. I use student thinking to drive the learning.”

To overcome this, she has created shared working spaces, such as Google Slides, where the students can work on problems simultaneously while she monitors their progress and is available to provide guidance. This has allowed her to continue to centre her teaching on student thinking.

Although there is no doubt this process has been a difficult one, Klassen is quick to point out that there have been a few “magical moments.” She explained a recent example, where a student openly voiced his frustration with a problem he was working on to the class. Another student quickly responded and provided a suggestion the fellow student needed to succeed.

Klassen is quick to credit the success of her methods to the collaborative effort of math teachers across the WRDSB. Every two weeks, math teachers are invited to meet virtually and discuss their successes, ideas and challenges in meetings organized by Lisa Hicknell and Jill Waters, two consultants with Learning Support Services.

“It’s really useful to talk to colleagues and get ideas from them,” she said.

Klassen isn’t alone, as Andrea Teichroeb, a math teacher at Grand River Collegiate Institute (GRCI) in Kitchener explained. The open conversation, and willingness of all involved to freely share their struggles and frustration has created a safe space to grow and learn amongst peers.

“It just makes for a better learning environment overall,” said Teichroeb. “Sharing those ideas and experiences allows you to have a menu of options to try with your own students.”

One of the most helpful new ideas that she discovered from this group was a website that acts as a digital whiteboard. Like Klassen, she too uses whiteboards as work surfaces for her students with the goal of creating a thinking classroom. However, with students learning remotely, she struggled to offer the same experience that students had in class. This one tool helped to fix that for her.

“It’s a fairly simple tool, but it just totally changed how I was able to interact with students,” said Teichroeb.

This collaboration with her colleagues has also led Teichroeb to rethink her assessment practices. Incorporating student portfolios has allowed her to move away from quizzes and tests, increasing the emphasis on student thinking rather than simply their ability to get the correct answers.

“It’s been going really well,” said Teichroeb. “The work they show, and the work they share is really inspirational.”

Reflecting on what they’ve both learned during this tumultuous year, their advice to other educators is to adopt a reflective stance, and assess what is working and what isn’t in their approaches. Focus on what’s working and be willing to listen to the students.

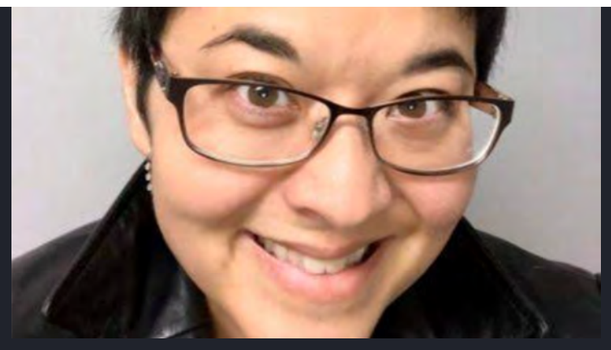
Start small, and don’t feel like you’ve got to change everything at once, but don’t miss the opportunity to build your own toolbox as an educator. “You can just dip your toe in, before jumping in,” said Teichroeb. “You can’t learn if you’re not trying things.”

Above all else, “give yourself some grace,” Klassen said. “It’s chaotic, messy and exhausting.”

Share This Story



Walking for Hope at Waterloo Collegiate Institute

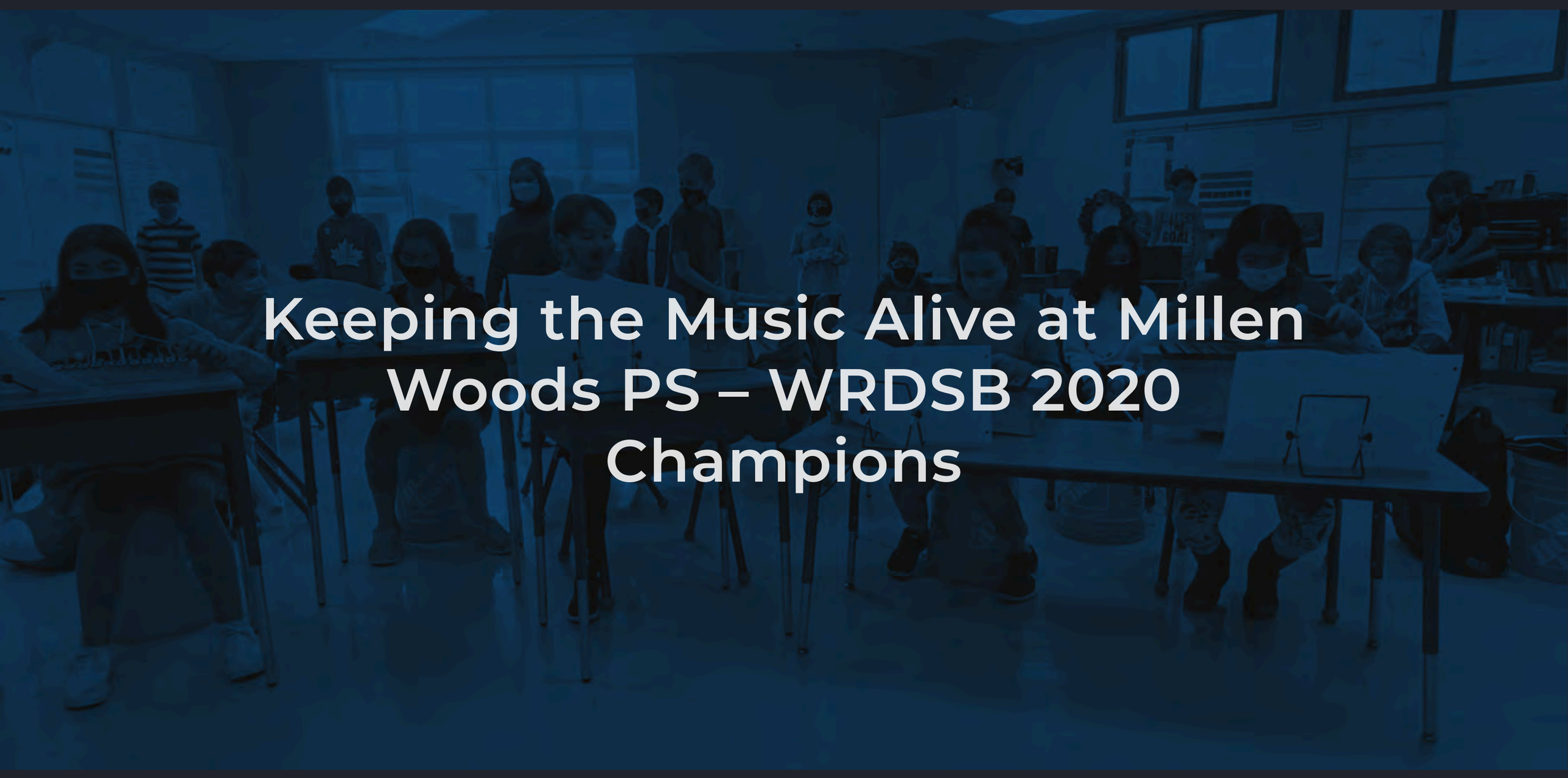


Supporting Every Student in the Move to Distance Learning



Being an Equity Champion at Elgin Street PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Keeping the Music Alive at Millen Woods PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions



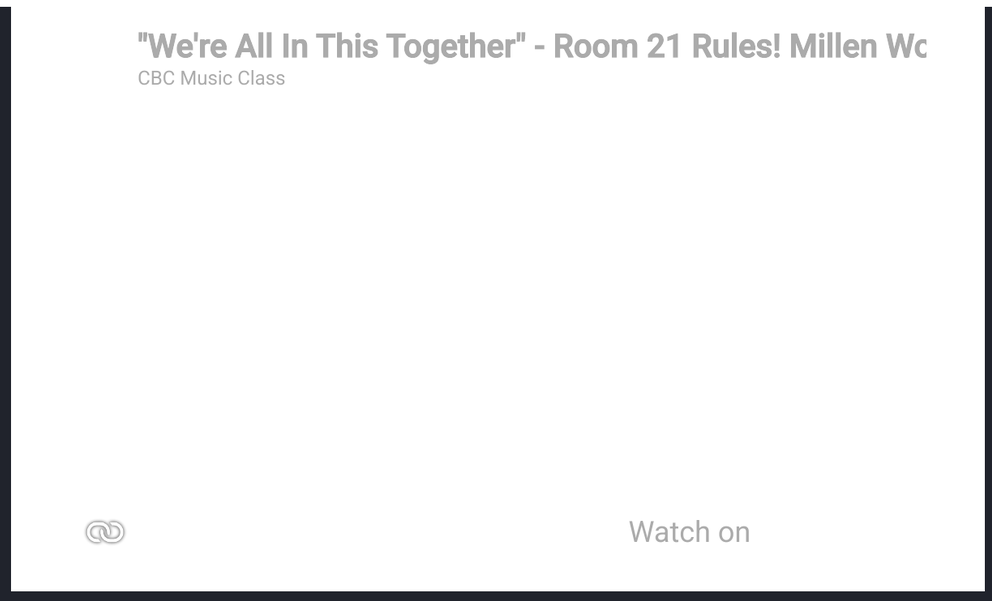
Keeping the Music Alive at Millen Woods PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions

Music is in the air, classrooms and hallways at Millen Woods Public School in Waterloo thanks to the dedication of music teacher Niki Kazemzadeh. Her work caught the attention of Heather Berry, a safe and healthy schools consultant with the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), who nominated her to be one of our WRDSB 2020 Champions.

“I just found it phenomenal,” said Berry, as she described seeing Kazemzadeh going above and beyond at a time when maintaining the baseline of teaching and learning is difficult enough. Berry’s role takes her throughout the WRDSB, as she works to support staff and schools in their adaptive practices for COVID-19 safety. She explained that, in her travels, Kazemzadeh’s work truly stood out and made an impression on her.

“To find time to do something like this when the day to day is hard enough – that’s a champion,” she wrote in her nomination.

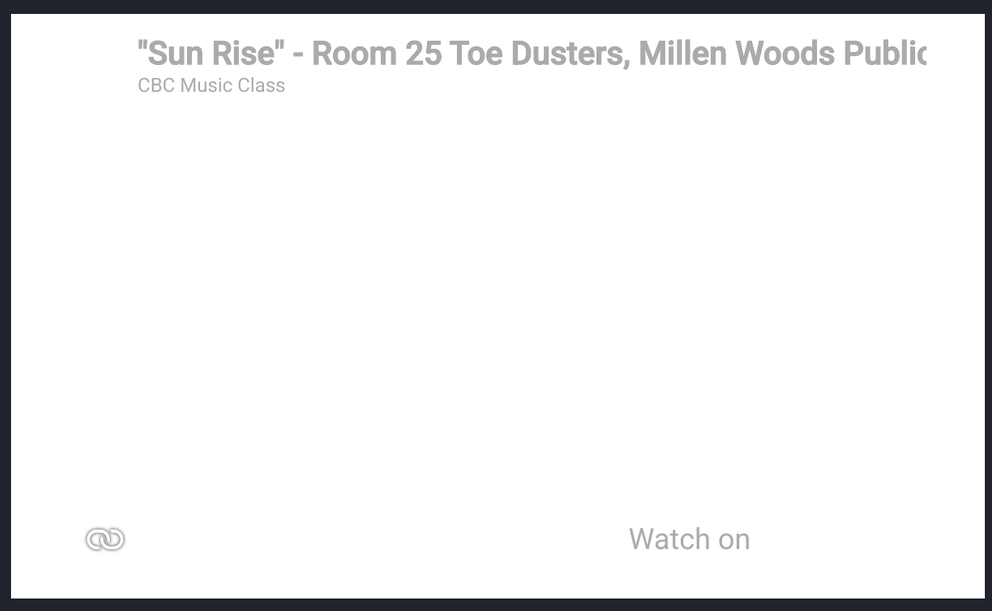
Kazemzadeh’s relentless determination to find a way to make teaching music and participating in the CBC’s 2020 Canadian Music Class Challenge a reality, while abiding by COVID-19 guidelines, was “super inspiring” for Berry.



When asked what it felt like to be nominated, Kazemzadeh was grateful to be nominated by someone she had only worked with briefly. She was quick to remark how much she enjoyed working with Berry.

“She was super kind,” said Kazemzadeh of Berry. “She was so encouraging and validating of my work.”

“It’s been a really tough year, I think for everybody,” said Kazemzadeh, as she explained that the nomination was a spot of joy and recognition during a difficult time.



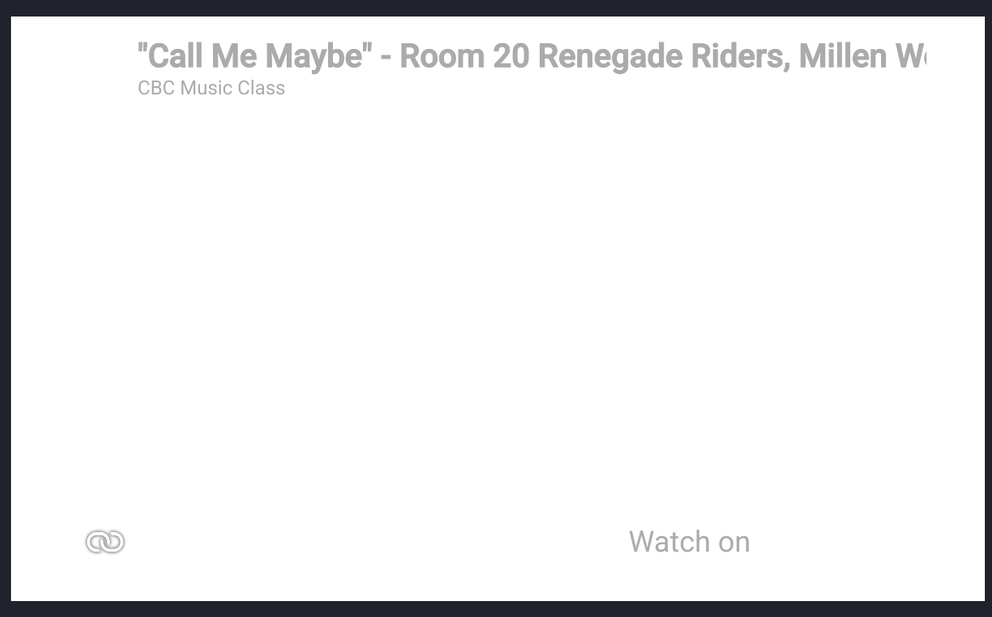
Abiding by COVID-19 regulations is something Kazemzadeh takes seriously. As a music teacher, Kazemzadeh works with classes throughout the school, having contact with every student and staff member at least once a week. As a result, she takes every precaution to mitigate the risks.

When taking on the project for the CBC 2020 Canadian Music Class Challenge, she reached out to Berry to ensure she was considering every health and safety angle possible. With the plan they created, each student was assigned their own instrument, stored in their own classroom for the duration of the project.

Boomwhackers, xylophones, bucket drums and egg shakers were just a few of the instruments available for students to choose. The buckets, initially purchased to act as added storage and improvised seating for students, were temporarily repurposed by Kazemzadeh as musical instruments.

“I’d been given a school set of bucket drums, as far as I was concerned,” she said. “That was very exciting.”

COVID-19 health and safety guidelines restrict the ability to have students sing, chant or hum at school, but Kazemzadeh didn’t let that stop her from adding vocal components to the classes CBC submissions. Students recorded themselves singing individually while at home, and she stitched them together with the classroom recordings to create the final pieces.



With the videos now complete, Kazemzadeh has a moment to reflect on the work that led her to this point. “I was pretty close to giving up at certain points”, she shared, and there were moments of self-doubt as she questioned whether or not she’d be able to bring it all together. She’s grateful for her colleagues at both Millen Woods and throughout the WRDSB who helped her to make this a reality.

“I have an incredible group of colleagues that I work with,” said Kazemzadeh. “They are nothing short of amazing.”

Kazemzadeh shared her guidance for other educators or staff who may be experiencing the same self-doubt and anxiety, with the simple advice to focus on finding the joy in being with students.

“Be joyful, have fun, don’t put too much pressure on yourself or the students and just enjoy your time together.”

WRDSB 2020 Champions

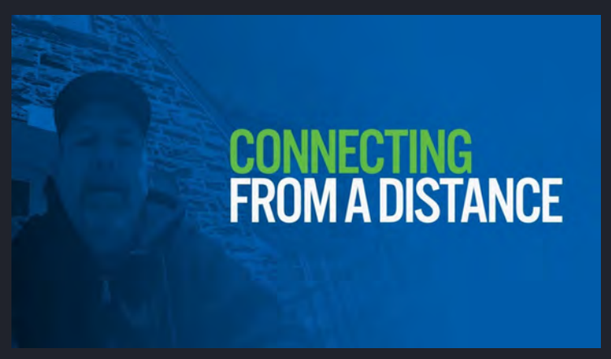
It was a year unlike any other in public education. All that we have achieved together as the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) would not have been possible without the individual contributions of our staff to support our students, staff and community.

Our WRDSB 2020 Champions campaign received hundreds of nominations from across the WRDSB. We highlighted a selection of these with stories like this one, which were posted on our corporate and school websites, and shared across our social media channels.

Share This Story



Marking Our Graduates Achievements in June 2020



Construction Technology – Connecting from a Distance

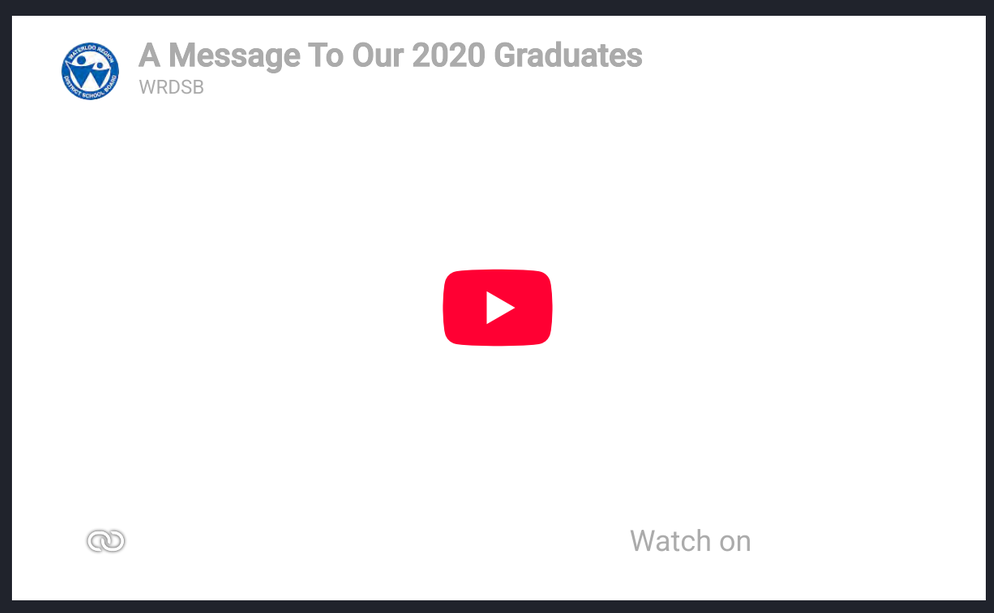


Hairstyling and Aesthetics – Connecting from a Distance

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Marking Our Graduates Achievements in June 2020



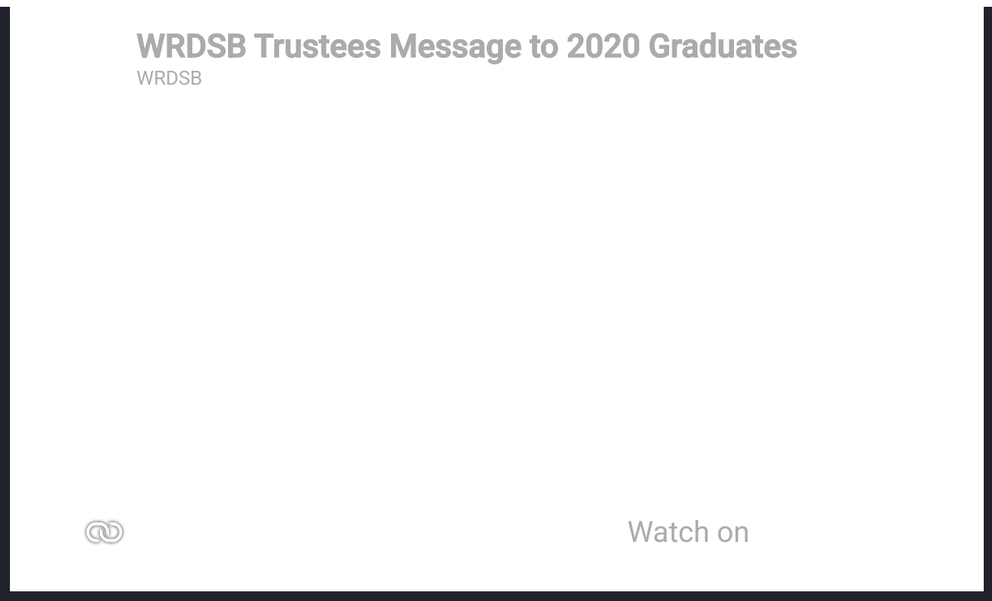
Marking Our Graduates Accomplishments in June 2020

Although we could not come together as we usually would to celebrate these accomplishments in June, we remained committed to celebrating the achievements of our graduating students. From those who are making the transition from Kindergarten to Grade 1, to those transitioning from Grade 8 to 9, all the way to the Grade 12 graduates who are preparing to set out on their next adventure.

Graduation is a time of celebration, of goals accomplished, and anticipation of what is to come. While this is not how we had anticipated ending our 2019-20 school year, we still celebrated their achievements, and considering all we had been through together, the sense of accomplishment was more palpable than ever.

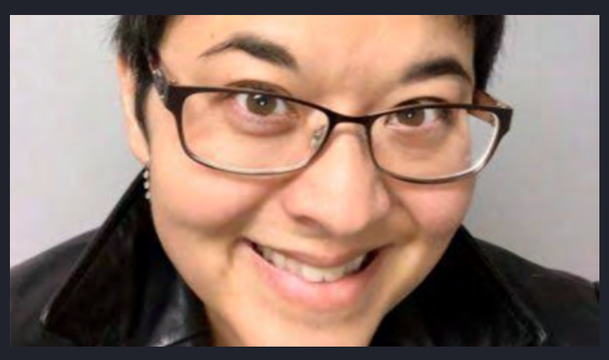
We also took a moment and expressed our gratitude, to all our students, for making our schools feel like communities. To help us say thank you, we invited some of our secondary principals, vice-principals, teachers, guidance counsellors, and coaches to share their wishes for our graduates.

Our Trustees also came together to share their well-wishes for our graduates, and to impart some wisdom as they reflected on what they wished they had known when they graduated themselves.



The celebration of our graduates didn't stop here, though, as we plastered our congratulations for them across Waterloo Region. From billboards, to buses, to the sides of our secondary schools – there was no way to miss how proud we were. Even the Education Centre was wearing a similar congratulatory banner, visible to all those who drive by. Our celebration continued with advertisements in local newspapers and on local radio stations, amplifying our message across the community.

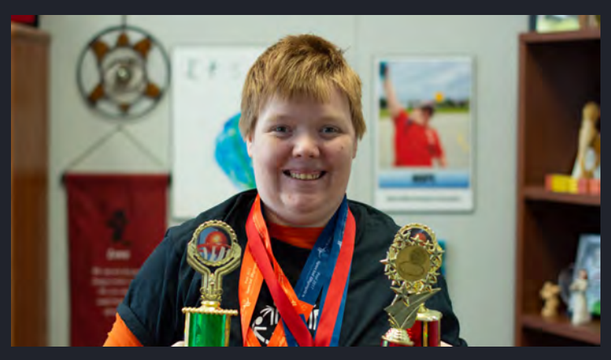
Share This Story



Supporting Every Student in the Move to Distance Learning



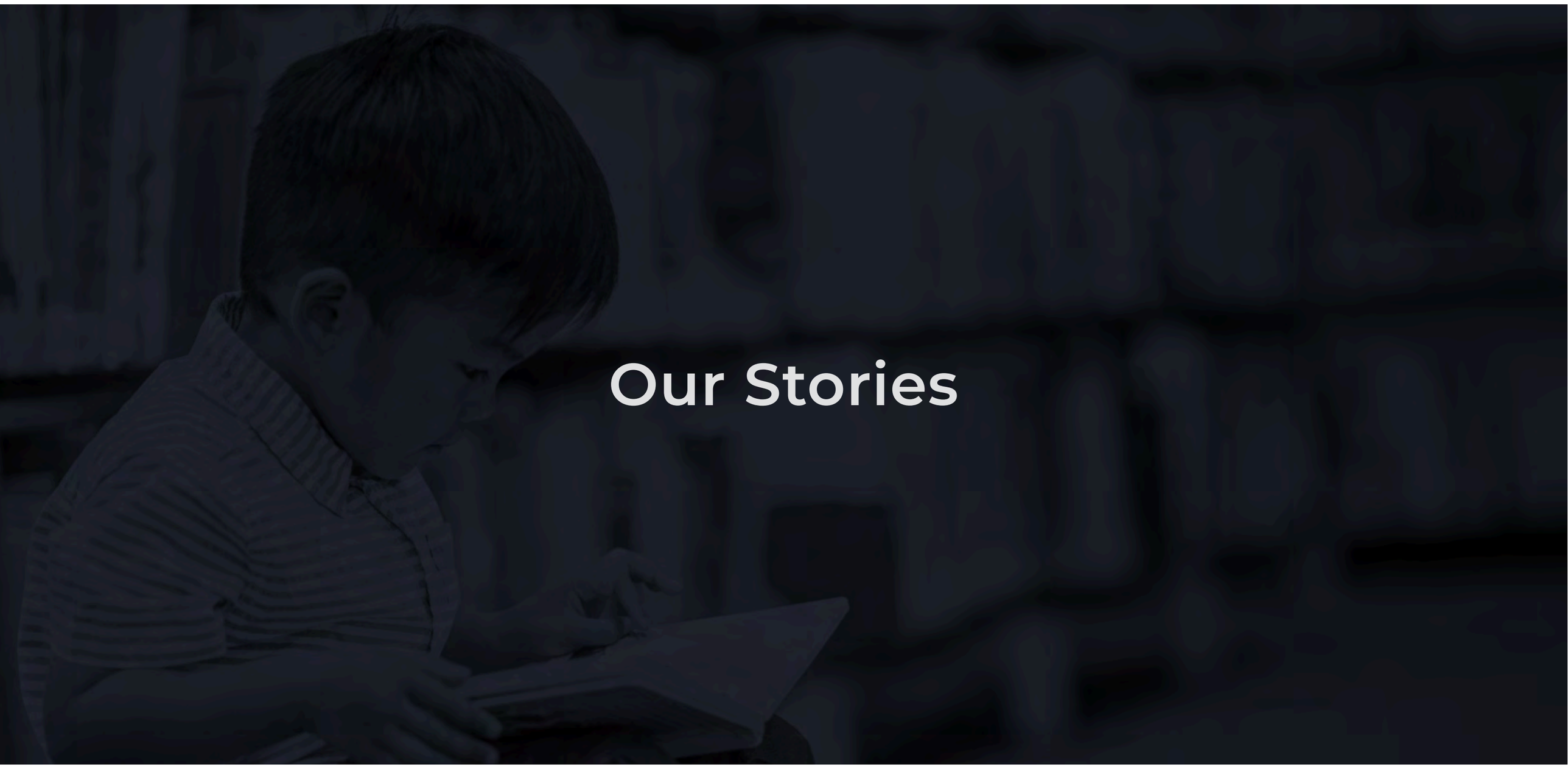
Being an Equity Champion at Elgin Street PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions



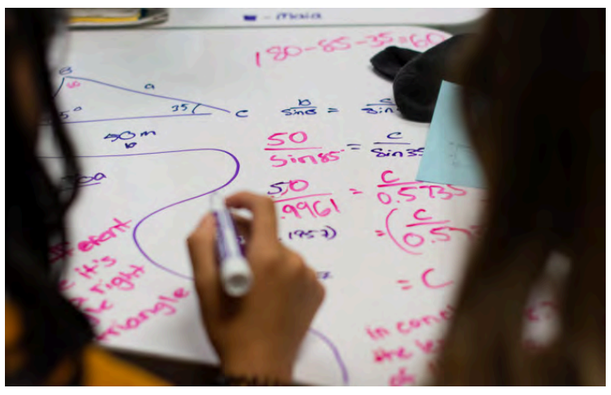
Freezin' for a Reason at the Polar Plunge

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020

Translate



Our Stories



Inspiring an Interest in Math, Even From a Distance

Inspiring an Interest in Math, Even From a Distance Math educators across the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) remain focused on keeping their students interested and



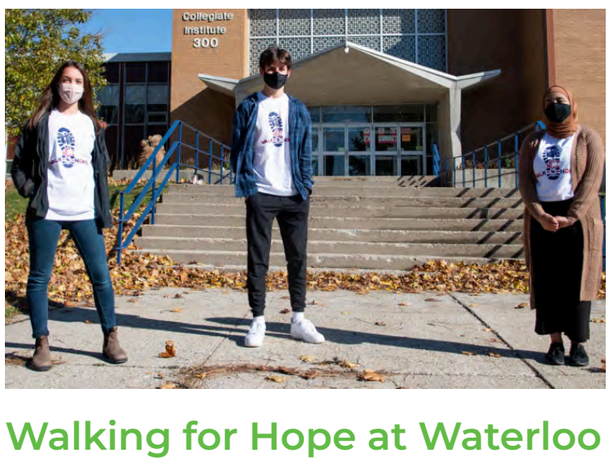
Supporting Staff Wellness and Learning at a Distance

Supporting Staff Wellness and Learning at a Distance In the days following the March 13 emergency closure of schools across Ontario, it was clear that supporting the



Around the Clock Support Schools Can Count On – WRDSB 2020 Champions

Around the Clock Support Schools Can Count On - WRDSB 2020 Champions Whenever we experience a turbulent or uncertain time, we look for someone to ground us,



Walking for Hope at Waterloo Collegiate Institute

Walking for Hope at Waterloo Collegiate Institute Health and safety regulations may have kept them physically distant, but students and staff at Waterloo Collegiate Institute (WCI) came



Supporting Every Student in the Move to Distance Learning

Supporting Every Student in the Move to Distance Learning “Ikigai” is a Japanese concept for finding one’s purpose and reason for being, and for Kimiko Shibata, it



Being an Equity Champion at Elgin Street PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions

Being an Equity Champion at Elgin Street PS - WRDSB 2020 Champions During a time when our administrators have the added responsibility of keeping our students and







Freezin’ for a Reason at the Polar Plunge

Freezin’ for a Reason at the Polar Plunge Spirits were high, even if the -7° celsius temperature outdoors wasn’t, as the brave participants at the Polar Plunge

Feeding Students in the Time of COVID-19

Feeding Students in the Time of COVID-19 Helping hands were busy across Waterloo Region as volunteers with Nutrition for Learning prepared food packages for delivery to schools

Supporting Student Well-being for the Return to School

Supporting Student Well-being for the Return to School As part of our ongoing work to assist families and students during the transition back to school in September



Keeping the Music Alive at Millen Woods PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions

Keeping the Music Alive at Millen Woods PS - WRDSB 2020 Champions Music is in the air, classrooms and hallways at Millen Woods Public School in Waterloo



WRDSB Helps Launch Black History Month in Waterloo Region

WRDSB Helps Launch Black History Month in Waterloo Region The light shone brightly through the expansive windows at the Ken Seiling Waterloo Region Museum in Kitchener, on



Teaching, Learning and Feeding the Community in Blair

Teaching, Learning and Feeding the Community in Blair On a brisk October morning near the end of the harvesting season, Dave Skene and Sarina Perchak gathered at



Marking Our Graduates Achievements in June 2020

Marking Our Graduates Accomplishments in June 2020 Although we could not come together as we usually would to celebrate these accomplishments in June, we remained committed



Construction Technology – Connecting from a Distance

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Hairstyling and Aesthetics – Connecting from a Distance

Hairstyling and Aesthetics | Connecting from a Distance Following the March 13 emergency closure of schools, staff worked swiftly to move our entire system online with



Celebrating Our Graduates in the Time of COVID-19

Celebrating Our Graduates in the Time of COVID-19 Graduating from secondary school has always represented a milestone achievement. The culmination of more than a decade of learning,

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Supporting Every Student in the Move to Distance Learning

“Ikigai” is a Japanese concept for finding one’s purpose and reason for being, and for Kimiko Shibata, it is the driving force behind her work supporting student learning as an English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD), Itinerant Resource Teacher, with a current focus on Elementary Distance Learning.

It began as a one day a week role, meant to provide resources to ESL teachers who were supporting students learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. But, when more than 2,000 ESL elementary students opted for distance learning, Shibata took on the position full time and was provided an opportunity to make a difference for staff and students across the WRDSB.

“We had a huge number of newcomers and students from refugee backgrounds enter into the program – it was quite shocking to me,” said Shibata. “A lot of these families have come from significant trauma and this pandemic is a scary time for them. Many parents are afraid to send their child out of their home or have multigenerational households and it’s a risk they are not willing to take. That’s why our trauma informed approach and connection is so vital.”

During the closure of schools in March, the need for extra supports became especially clear. Quickly seeing the need, Shibata helped to deliver essential items to families in need, such as food, clothing, school supplies, books, passwords and login information or health care and mental health resources – all in the family’s first language through the help of interpreters.

“The pandemic has shown us the inequities and that the most vulnerable people continue to be our most vulnerable,” Shibata explained. “The best thing we have done as a Board once we reopened was

taking that first week of school to connect with families – to figure out who needs a device, who needs internet, who needs care – that proactive communication and outreach was so important."

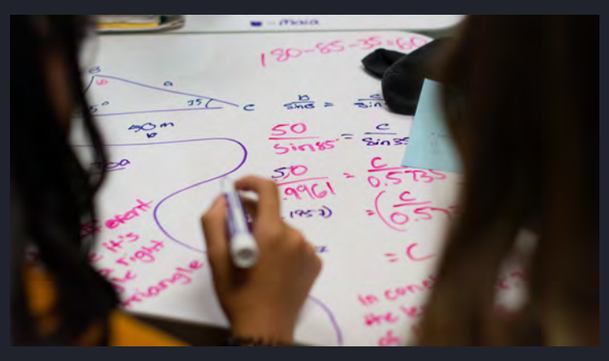
Shibata speaks with great passion about her work. Her appreciation for the opportunity to work with thousands of staff and students through her resources and support is obvious.

"The impact that I can make doing this with a slight change in role has been so incredible and such a positive thing to come out of such a scary time," she said. "It trickles down to the kids and makes them happy, and seeing them be successful is a happy thing for me."

Nominated as a WRDSB 2020 Champion by her peers, Shibata was described as optimistic, determined, helpful and hardworking. She was praised for her commitment to supporting other educators in providing teaching tools for and resources to help students.

"The people who work in education know – we teach kids first, we teach curriculum second and we recognize that if we don't address our students' basic needs, the learning just isn't going to happen," Shibata explained. "As educators, and as community members, we will always step in and work together to ensure the needs are met."

Share This Story



Inspiring an Interest in Math, Even From a Distance



Supporting Staff Wellness and Learning at a Distance



Around the Clock Support Schools Can Count On – WRDSB 2020 Champions

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020

Supporting Staff Wellness and Learning at a Distance



Supporting Staff Wellness and Learning at a Distance

In the days following the March 13 emergency closure of schools across Ontario, it was clear that supporting the mental health and well-being of the more than 8,000 Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) staff would be paramount. In response to this need, the Communications, Employee Wellness and Indigenous, Human Rights and Equity Departments came together to collaborate on the creation of a regular publication designed to offer resources and supports for staff: Supporting Ourselves, Supporting One Another.

Early editions included information on a range of topics, from how to create an ergonomic and safe at-home work environment, to addressing the anxiety that many feel during a global pandemic. Nancy Carse, Manager of Employee Wellness, explained that the publication has allowed staff to access a wide variety of mental health and well-being supports in one place.

“Rather than a flurry of different resources, we’re able to collect them all in one place,” said Carse. “It makes this information a lot more accessible and useful for our staff.”

The publication, now on it’s 22nd edition, has evolved to include resources designed to support staff learning when it comes to human rights and equity, from both internal and external sources in the community. This includes a selection of written, video and digital resources available to all staff to assist them in expanding their equity consciousness and understanding of their role in combating racism in our system and community.

Kim Radersma, Human Rights Officer in the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Department, has supported the publication through her expertise in equity and human rights. For Radersma,

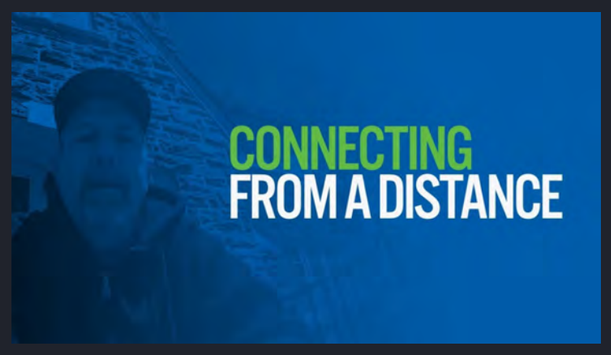
Supporting Ourselves, Supporting One Another has offered a valuable avenue to provide useful resources to every staff member of the WRDSB.

“Although we can’t meet in person for seminars or professional development, Supporting Ourselves, Supporting One Another has allowed us to stay connected,” said Radersma. “The learning continues for WRDSB staff, even at a distance.”

Share This Story



Marking Our Graduates Achievements in June 2020



Construction Technology – Connecting from a Distance



Hairstyling and Aesthetics – Connecting from a Distance

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Supporting Student Well-being for the Return to School



Supporting Student Well-being for the Return to School

As part of our ongoing work to assist families and students during the transition back to school in September 2020, we provided a variety of resources to help families prioritize and support student mental health and well-being.

Even at the best of times, some children have more trouble than other children when it comes to going to school. These resources include information that will help parents and caregivers understand more about the nature of anxiety and the problem with avoiding scary things.

As always, we wanted parents and caregivers to know that they are not alone when it comes to helping children with the return to school. When needed, educators and school board staff members from psychology and social work can always connect with caregivers and parents to help children overcome fears about things such as going to school.

Caregivers' Guide to Setting the Stage for Return to School

The Caregivers' Guide to Setting the Stage for Return to School, compiled by WRDSB Psychological Services, is designed to help caregivers support and communicate with their children in ways that help them feel calm and secure as they return to school.

While some of these suggestions were particularly helpful in setting the stage for the “return-to-school” phase, they also reflect strategies that can be helpful on an ongoing basis. For example, parents and caregivers were provided information about the cycle of anxiety and school avoidance, as well as how the words we use may lower or increase anxiety.

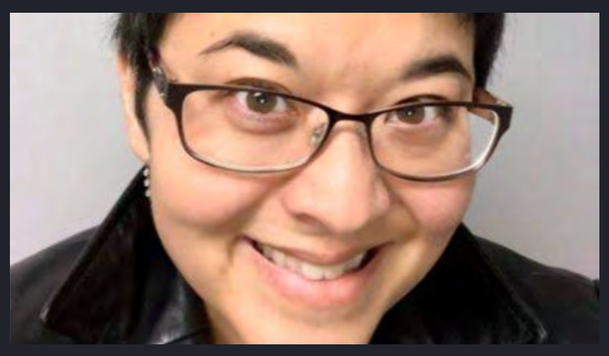
Five Minutes to Wellbeing in Five Weeks

The Five in Five resources, created by WRDSB Psychological Services, were designed to offer parents and caregivers a guide to incorporating everyday practices that can contribute to overall well-being. This resource was created for students in Grade 4 or above, but younger students can also benefit with assistance from adults.

Are You Ready to Go Back to School?

The Are You Ready to Go Back to School guide from WRDSB Psychological Services offered some questions and suggestions for students and families to consider prior to the return to school in September 2020. Shifting from the freedom of summer to the school routine is often difficult. But this year was especially hard because we had been away from school for such a long time.

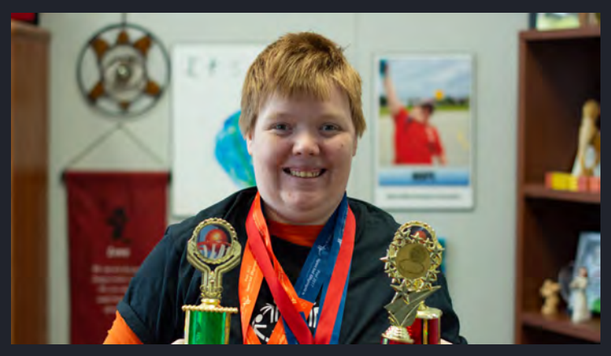
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Supporting Every Student in the Move to Distance Learning



Being an Equity Champion at Elgin Street PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions



Freezin’ for a Reason at the Polar Plunge

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Teaching, Learning and Feeding the Community in Blair



Teaching, Learning and Feeding the Community in Blair

On a brisk October morning near the end of the harvesting season, Dave Skene and Sarina Perchak gathered at the Indigenous Food Garden, located at the Blair Outdoor Education Centre in Cambridge. Skene and Perchak are both with the White Owl Native Ancestry Association (WONAA) – Skene an Executive Director and Perchak a Land Based Education Coordinator. The two were busy taking an overview of the plot as they prepared for the task of putting the garden to rest for the season.

This garden was made possible thanks to a partnership between the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) and WONAA, who work to maintain and grow the gardens, in addition to offering land-based Indigenous education programs which connect to social studies curriculum topics focusing on past and present issues facing Indigenous communities in Canada.

The Indigenous Food Garden began as a smaller medicine garden, containing plants like sage, tobacco, sweetgrass and strawberries, Skene explained. The garden has now grown to occupy a much larger space, with a wider variety of both food-producing and medicinal plants.

During a typical school year, the garden plays a central role in the Land Based Indigenous Studies program. Each year, dozens of classes would make the trip out to visit the garden and learn about everything from seed-saving to planting techniques. The garden provides “a way to share aspects of Indigenous knowledge around food and land with teachers, students and others in the WRDSB community,” said Skene. “It provides an opportunity for us to share that with the greater community.”

With students unable to visit in-person, WONAA turned their sights to how they could engage their gardens to support the wider community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their focus has now turned to food-production at the four gardens they maintain across Waterloo Region. In total, they've produced more than 2200 lbs of food that has been shared with approximately 250 Indigenous people in the community.

"We've been able to share it with the Indigenous community," said Skene, adding that roughly one third of that produce was grown at the Blair Indigenous Food Garden.

Importantly, Perchak explained, this includes hard-to-find items, like those grown in the medicine garden. These culturally significant items have only become more difficult to find during a global pandemic.

Food production extends beyond the borders of the garden itself, and into the forest nearby, as Skene and Perchak also took time to forage for highbush cranberries to be made into a delicious preserve. Skene explained that the berries, which let off a somewhat unpleasant odour, have a sweet, enjoyable flavour.

The Indigenous Food Garden may look somewhat familiar to those who have grown their own vegetables at home, but there are important distinctions. Skene explained the idea of relationships between all things in the garden, and between the garden and those who maintain it, plays a crucial role in shaping their approach.

"It's not just the idea of the function of growing food," said Skene. "It's us trying to be instructed by the garden about what we're doing here and how we're doing it."

This approach has led to innovative methods to help deter pests from snacking on the contents of the garden. Skene explained they plant Aztec Marigolds, a tall, yellow flower with a pungent smell, to keep rabbits and other small animals at bay. The flowers also attract pollinators, providing numerous benefits to the garden.

The concept of relationships extends to the types of plants cultivated. They aren't planting just any corn. The seeds planted in this garden are either Indigenous to this region, or grown by Indigenous communities in this region.

"For most cultures, food is really significant," said Skene. "There's an ancestral relationship with the corn that we're growing."

Maintaining the Indigenous Food Garden is a year-round job. As the harvesting season comes to a close, Skene and Perchak will soon be busy with the task of putting the garden to rest for the winter. Seed-saving is the first step in this process and involves retrieving and drying the seeds from the harvested plants. Excess seeds are shared with the wider Indigenous community, with some going across Canada.

For Perchak, the Indigenous Food Garden's most valuable product is the knowledge, understanding and learning opportunity it presents. Knowledge gained in this garden, just like the seeds it produces, can be passed down – generation to generation – offering the chance to produce an even greater harvest next season.

"There's so much to learn on the land," she said.

The celebration of our graduates didn't stop here, though, as we plastered our congratulations for them across Waterloo Region. From billboards, to buses, to the sides of our secondary schools – there was no way to miss how proud we were. Even the Education Centre was wearing a similar congratulatory banner, visible to all those who drive by. Our celebration continued with advertisements in local newspapers and on local radio stations, amplifying our message across the community.

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Around the Clock Support Schools Can Count On –



Walking for Hope at Waterloo Collegiate Institute



Supporting Every Student in the Move to Distance Learning

WRDSB 2020
Champions

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Walking for Hope at Waterloo Collegiate Institute



Walking for Hope at Waterloo Collegiate Institute

Health and safety regulations may have kept them physically distant, but students and staff at Waterloo Collegiate Institute (WCI) came together in support of reuniting families with the Walk for Hope. They walked the 9,731 km distance from WCI to Syria in an effort to raise the money needed to sponsor the reunification of a refugee family. The parents and three daughters are safe in Canada, but two of their brothers are in dangerous conditions overseas.

Incredibly, they quickly reached and surpassed their distance and fundraising goals. As of Friday, November 13, they had walked more than 9,731 km and raised more than $15,637.05.

Lynn Schulze is the English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Language Development (ELD) Department Head at WCI, and played an instrumental role in beginning the effort to support the reunification of this family. Schulze's involvement began as part of her work with Crossing Borders, a group of newcomer and Canadian-born students and alumni of WCI who raise awareness about newcomer issues and break down barriers between people. When Schulze first heard the story of the family divided, she was compelled to find a way to help.

Schulze described hearing the family's story of their harrowing journey out of Syria, in an effort to find safety, and the unimaginable choice that faced them when only part of their family was offered the chance to come to Canada six years ago. "The parents had to make a gut-wrenching decision to leave behind three members of their family," said Schulze. "The right thing is to help."

Previous fundraising efforts began in March 2020, with Art for Hope and Portraits for Hope helping to raise money through the sale of art and portrait photography. The current effort aimed to raise an additional $15,000 towards the total $35,000 needed to sponsor the brothers for their first year in Canada.

With Walk for Hope, Schulze reached out to her colleague Kerri Jilesen, the leadership teacher at WCI for help. Jilesen's four student leadership classes jumped at the opportunity and are all involved in running the initiative. They've been busy collecting pledge packages, distributing t-shirts and helping students and staff track the kilometres they've walked.

The students landed on a goal of walking the distance from WCI to Syria as a way of representing the scale of the journey this family has already undertaken, and the journey they hope to help the remaining brothers complete. Jilesen explained that they began by asking themselves "how could we make it representative of what this family went through?" To keep track of the total distance they have travelled, those participating in the Walk for Hope used apps to track their daily distances and submitted them to the organizers for a grand total.

Mona Alatia is a fifth year student at WCI, and is no stranger to the dangerous journey involved with coming to Canada as a refugee. Approximately 10 years ago, Alatia's family fled war in Syria, making their way to Jordan before coming to Canada. She understands the pain of having to leave loved ones behind, as much of her extended family remains in precarious conditions.

"I know how hard it feels to leave people behind," said Alatia. "I really just want to help this family to come together."

"These students have been fantastic," said Jilesen. "They go above and beyond every time."

Alatia spoke of her own personal pain, her strong voice wavering only momentarily as she described losing cherished members of her family who are still in Syria.

"It's unfortunate for us that we cannot help them there," said Alatia. "They mean a lot to me."

As a member of the student leadership class, Alatia knew she had to get involved to help support Walk for Hope. Seeing so many of her peers and educators band together to support a family who has similar experiences to her own, Alatia explained, has been truly inspiring.

Sophia Malo, a Grade 12 student at WCI who is also in the student leadership class, spoke about the added benefits of Walk for Hope, beyond helping to reunite a family. In a time when staff and students remain at a distance because of COVID, the event offered a chance for the entire WCI community to come together and work towards a shared goal, with collective effort.

"It really means a lot to see our whole school come together for such a good cause," said Malo.

Will Aurini, a classmate of Malo and Alatia's, echoed this sentiment. He noted that it's been difficult to bring the whole school together while respecting COVID-related restrictions. Aurini explained that, as a school with an ESL population of around 30%, the Walk for Hope was a great way to bring everyone together in support of members of their own community.

For a school that has a history of supporting refugee families and newcomer students, Schulze explains that seeing the staff and students come together in support of Walk for Hope, is no surprise to her.

"We're just motivated to do the right thing in a world that isn't always the safest, happiest place," said Schulze. "We like to share our privilege and do anything we can to make our newcomer students feel important and connected."

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Supporting Student Well-being for the Return to School



Keeping the Music Alive at Millen Woods PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions



WRDSB Helps Launch Black History Month in Waterloo Region

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



WRDSB Helps Launch Black History Month in Waterloo Region



WRDSB Helps Launch Black History Month in Waterloo Region

The light shone brightly through the expansive windows at the Ken Seiling Waterloo Region Museum in Kitchener, on February 1, 2020 as members of the community came together to launch Black History Month. A number of representatives from the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) participated, including Human Rights and Equity Advisor Deepa Ahluwalia.

The event, hosted by the Caribbean Canadian Association of Waterloo Region (CCAWR), offered the opportunity for organizations that support the African, Caribbean and Black community to showcase what they do, and who they are. More importantly, it invited members of the community to come out and engage with these organizations.

For Ahluwalia, as an organization that serves the public, it's vital for the WRDSB to have a presence at this event. The value of being part of this event was clear to see, with Ahluwalia and other members of the WRDSB, as well as members of the WRDSB Black Brilliance Advisory Committee, chatting and connecting with countless members of the public.

"It's so important that we, as a school board, are present at community events," said Ahluwalia. "If we are serving students and families, we need to be building relationships."

Lannois Carroll-Woolery is the president of the CCAWR, and echoed Ahluwalia's message, and explained that the core purpose of the event is to bring all these organizations and members of the

community together under one roof, with the aim of fostering relationships and connections. Attendees had a chance to hear from local dignitaries, including Minister of Diversity and Inclusion and Youth and MP for Waterloo Bardish Chagger, MP for Kitchener-Conestoga Tim Louis, and MPP for Kitchener Centre Laura Mae Lindo.

“Not everyone knows everyone else,” said Carroll-Woolery. “We’re connecting the professionals with the university students, we’re connecting the university students with the MPs and MPPs.”

Black History Month, celebrated in Canada every February since 1996, encourages all Canadians to celebrate Black history and culture, Carroll-Woolery explained. Southwestern Ontario, in particular, offers a particularly rich historical learning opportunity as it was part of the Underground Railroad. The Ken Seiling Waterloo Region Museum also hosted a special exhibit focusing on Nelson Mandela, which opened on February 7, 2020, coinciding with Black History Month.

The Black History Month launch event featured a rich learning opportunity for attendees, thanks to an exhibit from the Canadian Multicultural Inventors Museum (CMIM). The exhibit, Carroll-Woolery explained, showcases inventors of African descent and highlighted their innovative contributions, many of which are used every day.

Francis Jeffers is the founder and executive director of CMIM, and explained his goal is to encourage young Canadians to see themselves in science, technology and engineering. He hopes what they learn will inspire them to follow the path of innovation.

“There’s somebody who looks like you, who encompasses you who’s been an innovator, so you can too,” said Jeffers. “The whole idea is to celebrate diversity and innovation.”

For Carroll-Woolery, this perfectly sums up his hopes for the event, as an opportunity to spark a broader conversation, and create the chance for members of the community to work together in interesting and exciting ways.

“We can become stronger as a community when we work together,” said Carroll-Woolery.

Share This Story



Feeding Students in the Time of COVID-19



Supporting Student Well-being for the Return to School



Keeping the Music Alive at Millen Woods PS – WRDSB 2020 Champions

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020