2021 DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT

As I take some time to reflect on 2021, I see a year of continued and renewed challenge, but also a year of continued and renewed growth and determination. Though we were faced with a number of switches from in-person to remote learning, we saw our staff and community coming together, exercising creativity and

innovation to support students' continued learning and growth.

jeewan chanicka - Director of Education

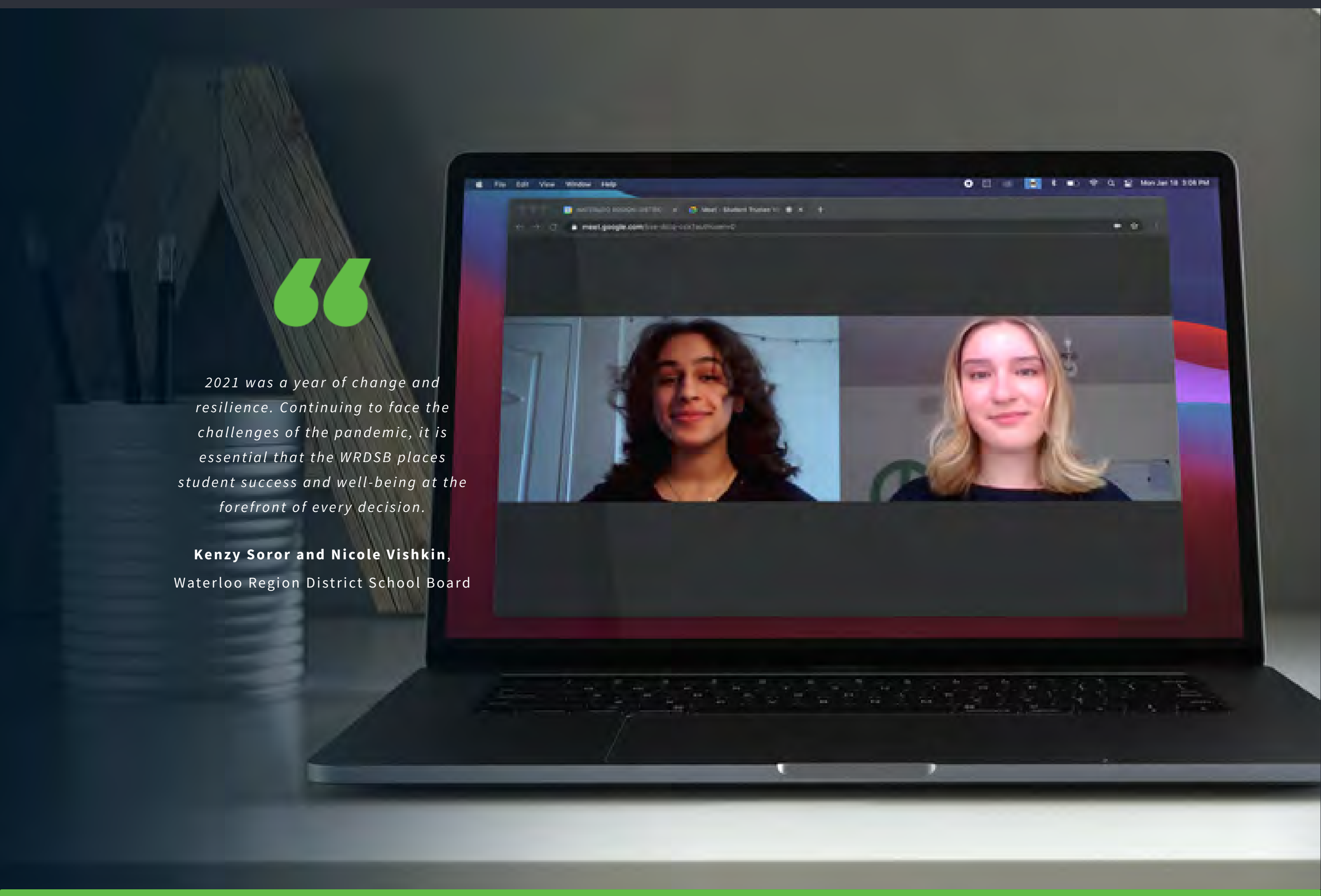


DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I want to express our sincere gratitude and appreciation for the work of all in the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) in 2021. Though we faced another year full of challenges in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, we can be proud of what we achieved. In support of student achievement and well-being, the Board of Trustees continued to serve as the voice of our community, helping to guide our system through the unknown. This year's annual report is a fitting tribute to all that we accomplished together over these past 12 months.

Chair of the Board of Trustees Scott Piatkowski,
Waterloo Region District School Board





2021 was a year of change and resilience. Continuing to face the challenges of the pandemic, it is essential that the WRDSB places student success and well-being at the forefront of every decision.

Kenzy Soror and Nicole Vishkin,
Waterloo Region District School Board

LETTER FROM STUDENT TRUSTEES

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND COMMITMENTS

As we look back on 2021, it is clear to see that while it was a year of immense challenge and difficulty for all in our community, it once again demonstrated the dedication and commitment of all of those in the WRDSB. Though our year was again affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, everyone – our students, our staff and our community – adapted and rose to the occasion. Whether students are learning remotely at home, or in-person at one of our schools, we continue to build pathways to success for all of our students.

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.

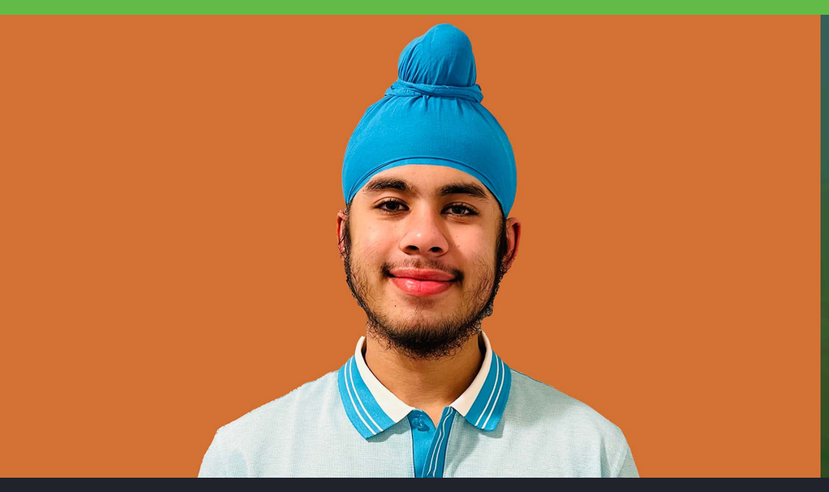
In addition to making consistent use of evidence and data to monitor our work, we will prioritize the wellness of our staff and students. We will work collaboratively to improve our learning and working environments in the best interest of student and staff well-being.

Math

Graduation Rates

Well-Being

Our Stories

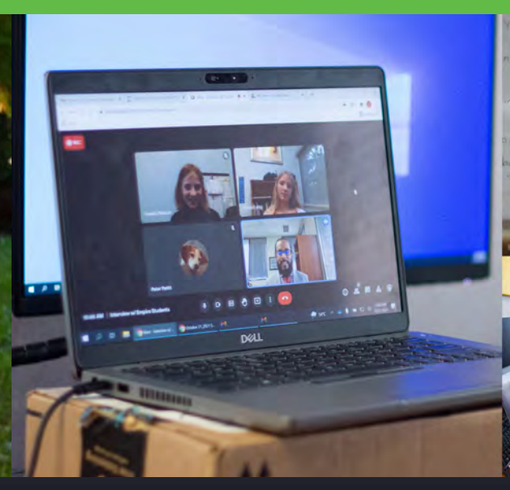


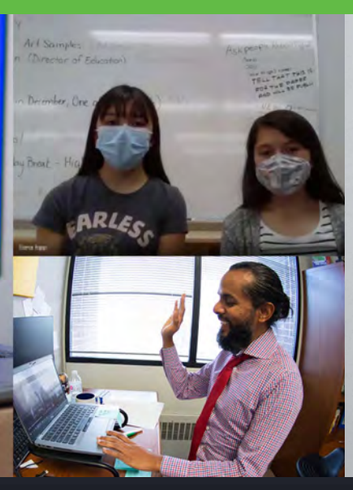




READ ALL OF OUR STORIES









Waterloo Region District School Board 2020





Director’s Message

As I take some time to reflect on 2021 and its many challenges, I see what has also been a year of continued growth, resilience and many successes. Though we were faced with a number of switches from in-person to remote learning, we saw our staff and community coming together, exercising compassion, creativity and innovation to safely support students’ continued learning, well-being and growth.

Waterloo Region is known as Canada’s innovation hub, and we saw more evidence of this in 2021. In October, the Province announced that the Ontario Government will distribute six million free menstrual products per year to school boards. This is a step in the right direction. Since 2019, the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) has addressed period equity in our system, beginning with providing free period products in every school and alternative education site.

We are building the classrooms of tomorrow in the WRDSB. In 2021 we built on our existing Chromebook Project, expanding the rollout of individual devices to Grade 7 and 8 students. Additionally, we became the first school board in Canada to implement Microsoft’s Azure Virtual Desktop (AVD) which allows students to access a high-performance complete modern desktop computer from any device, anywhere with an internet connection. We now have 250 classes with more than 5200 students actively using these virtual resources and we continue to receive requests from different educators to extend access to new courses. This will help to ensure that students have equitable access to devices that are important for learning, student achievement and well-being. Whether students were learning in our schools, or remotely at home, we worked together to help WRDSB students reach their fullest potential.



In spite of the pandemic-related challenges, our strategic plan continued to serve as our guide. We continued to demonstrate our commitment to putting each and every one of our students first as we faced new challenges. An integral part of this has been our work focusing on Indigenous students and communities, and the prioritization of human rights and equity in all that we do as a school board. With the launch of the Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Department in June, this work becomes a clear focus for us. In December we continued to build on this with the launch of our Anishinaabemowin Language Program. This offers students in Grades 1 to 12 and adults in our community the opportunity to learn about Anishinaabemowin heritage and language.

The culture of innovation in Waterloo Region, and in the WRDSB, continues to shine bright. We saw standout examples, like Ashley McCarl Palmer at Waterloo Collegiate Institute (WCI), who received the 2021 CAP Award for Excellence in Teaching High School/CEGEP Physics (Ontario) in recognition of her approach to teaching physics, which included moving away from exams. Hardit Singh, a Grade 10 student at Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute, set his sights on addressing global eye health by inventing a hand-held device to screen for disease. Innovation occurs every day in our classrooms, both in person and online, as our system continues to evolve and adapt.

We know we are not alone in supporting student learning. We are partners with parents, families and caregivers in every student's journey on their learning pathway. The WRDSB's commitment to this partnership was seen in the work of our Black Brilliance team, which includes both former and current students and staff, in addition to community members and groups like the Black Brilliance Advisory Council.

We also had incredible examples of progress across our system in meeting our operational goals. Our students were recognized for their passion and skill in STEAM, our staff built a new system to allow students to access the tools they need to continue learning remotely and the efforts of our students showed that they learned just how important well-being is to their success and the success of their peers.

The WRDSB Board of Trustees continues to play a vital role in guiding and leading our system. On behalf of our community, they provide an important conduit for the voices of parents, caregivers, families, students and the broader public.

This past year I had the chance to visit 100 schools and sites across our district and spoke directly with hundreds of students, including student journalists. It allowed me to hear what mattered to them, their hopes and vision for the future. We must set our sights on creating an education system that meets the needs of all students, so that every one is able to reach their fullest potential, and succeed in school and life.

One of the things I have been most proud of as the challenges have unfolded has been the way staff have come forward and co-led with love and compassion. I must acknowledge the leadership of Associate Director Lila Read and our full senior team who have come together and continue to do their best in challenging, ever-changing circumstances. What you see here is a representation of our circle of shared leadership and the work of many people in **all** parts of our organization. Whatever their role, it takes a village to do what we have been doing – we are the WRDSB village and I am grateful for each and every member. We are stronger when we lead together and on behalf of all we serve.

I can't wait to see where we'll go as we embark on a new strategic planning process where we emphasize our commitment to our students – each and every one. I hope you'll join me on this journey to reimagine public education in Waterloo Region.



jeewan chanicka

Director of Education

Our Stories



Announcing the Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Department



WRDSB Staff, Students and Community Members Recognized for Black Brilliance Work by Kitchener MPP



Volunteers Dig In at Two Cambridge Schools for Microforesting Effort

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



A Letter from Student Trustees

A Letter From Kenzy Soror and Nicole Vishkin





As Student Trustees, we acknowledge how uniquely challenging this year has been. We are proud of the adaptability and resilience each WRDSB student has demonstrated amidst the turbulence of the 2021-2022 school year. We recognize that fighting barriers to create an inclusive space is an effort that requires patience and humility, and we are grateful to play a part in this process alongside the continuous efforts of stakeholders across the school district.

Our role is to represent students at the Board Table and ensure that student voice is the focal point of every decision. We are also honoured to work alongside other dedicated students in bringing student voice to WRDSB committees, including the School Naming Review Committee, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Group, French Immersion Review Committee, Policy Working Group, and Environmental Sustainability Committee.

This year, we wanted to shift the idea of student leadership into one that encompasses every student, so we have revamped Student Senate. It is now Student Roundtable: a more inclusive and engaging platform that invites every student from all senior elementary and secondary schools to advocate for themselves, their peers, and consult with Board staff. In these meetings, we encourage students to discuss topics relevant to them such as equity in board policies, social justice issues, mental health, and inclusive representation, to name a few. Our Student Trustee Instagram (@wrdsb_students) and emails are additional avenues that are available for students to reach out for support, ask questions, or provide feedback. We thank WRDSB staff for their help in realizing our vision and look forward to their support as we continue to develop this platform.

2021 was a year of change and resilience. Continuing to face the challenges of the pandemic, it is essential that the WRDSB places student success and well-being at the forefront of every decision.

Moving forward, we will strive to make the best out of everything 2022 has to offer. We will continue to search for opportunities to advocate for students and engage a

more diverse student body. As Student Trustees, we believe that student input is invaluable to the WRDSB and welcome every idea brought forward in the future!

Your 2021-22 Student Trustees,

Kenzy Soror and Nicole Vishkin

Our Stories



Anishinaabemowin Language Program



Junior Journalists and jeewan: Listening and Learning from Student Voice



Supporting Staff and Supporting Our System

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020

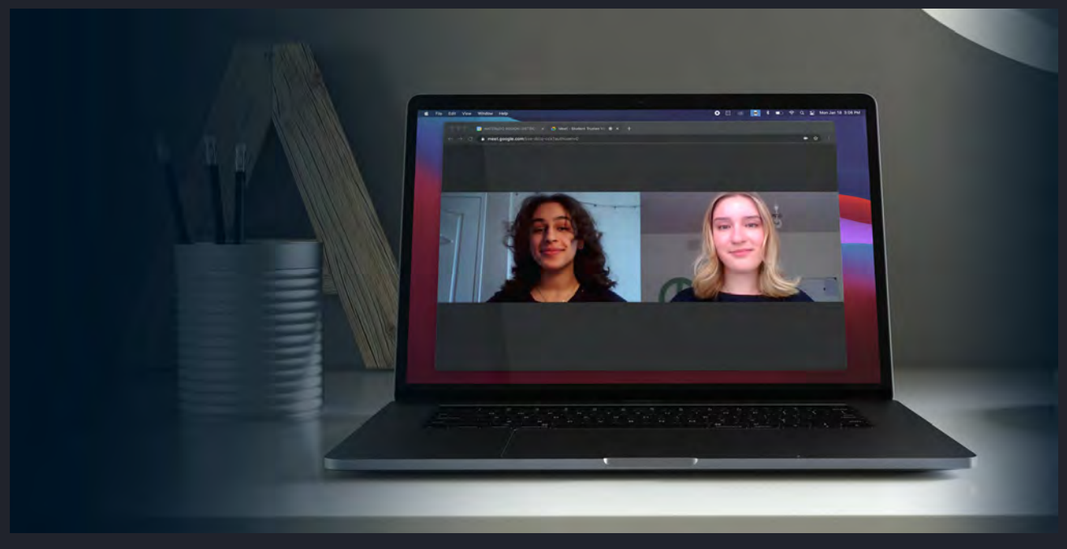


Our students are first – each and every one

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.

An important part of this work is centring on and focusing student voice. Our Student Trustees, Kenzy Soror and Nicole Vishkin, play an important role in representing every WRDSB student on our Board of Trustees. They help to bring the student perspective to issues that impact our schools and student learning each and every day. This has become even more valuable as the challenges to students multiplied during the global pandemic.

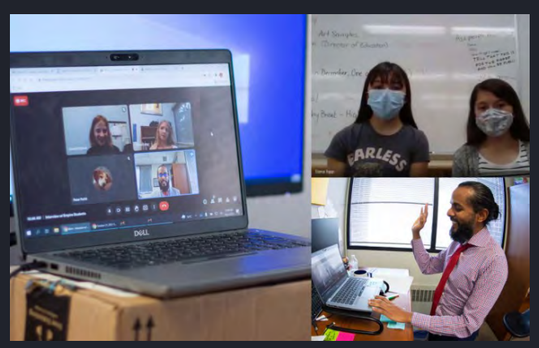


Our students pursue individual learning pathways that reflect their interests, develop skills for the future and inspire global citizenship.

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.

Director of Education jeewan chanicka had the chance to meet with a few junior journalists to answer their questions and talk about their hopes for the future of education. Students from Empire Public School and Country Hills Public School asked about the role of director, and what chanicka's goals for the role are.

As part of preparing students for this world, and their future in it, chanicka sees opportunities for students to focus their learning on answering big questions that are connected to real-world issues.



Junior Journalists and jeewan: Listening and Learning from Student Voice

Our students succeed in reaching their potential and graduating from 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.

Dina Orucevic, a Grade 12 student at Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational School (KCI), wasn't always confident in her abilities in STEM, but that changed when she took part in a contest offered at her school. This started her on a path that would eventually see her receive a Schulich Leader Scholarship, valued at $100,000.

As she prepared to take on her next adventure, studying Systems Design Engineering at the University of Waterloo, Orucevic shared some words of wisdom for future students who are looking to follow their interests and build a foundation for success.

"I would just say…stay positive, stay motivated, stay passionate," said Orucevic. "Whatever you put your mind to, you'll be able to do."



Passion for STEM Earns Student $100,000 Scholarship

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.

Chris Ashley, a history teacher at Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational School (KCI), exemplifies this focus in his approach to teaching history. Ashley's classroom was never a place where you would receive the traditional, Euro-centric version of history. "You're going to get more of a people approach, rather than military approach," he said.

Students often remark how many new, different parts of history they learn as a result of this method. It fills in the gaps and offers new perspectives on events and time periods already covered in many history courses.

"The more you learn, you realize, there is more to learn," said Ashley.



Changing How History is Taught – All Year Long

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.

Avenue Road Public School and Manchester Public School in Cambridge saw the power of community when volunteers from Sustainable Waterloo Region (SWR), Energy+, EY Canada and the Ages Foundation came together to plant 170 trees in November.

The microforesting efforts at the two schools will bring new life to these greenspaces, and enhance their ability to help fight climate change.

"Trees and microforests provide a number of benefits," said Taylor. "Trees through their lifetime will suck carbon out of the atmosphere, they provide habitat for insects and small animals and they help with runoff."

Beyond the welfare of the environment, these spaces will provide enhanced learning opportunities for students, and more teaching options for the staff at the schools. Taylor hopes that these spaces will provide the basis for building relationships with and understanding nature.



Volunteers Dig In at Two Cambridge Schools for Microforesting Effort

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.

Ashley McCarl Palmer embodies this spirit in her approach to teaching physics to students at Waterloo Collegiate Institute (WCI). McCarl Palmer made three major shifts in her approach over the past five years: She has gone gradeless in her approach to assessment, she has expanded her students' physics toolkits and she has adopted "thinking classroom" strategies.

Her innovation was recognized with the 2021 CAP Award for Excellence in Teaching High School/CEGEP Physics (Ontario). Presented by the Canadian Association of Physicists (CAP), the award recognizes excellence in teaching physics in Canadian high schools.

"To be included in their circle was a pretty high honour," said McCarl Palmer.



Award-Winning Innovation in Physics Education

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 working together, to ensure that every student in the WRDSB is supported in achieving their full potential.

The WRDSB's Black Brilliance work, involving both former and current students and staff, in addition to community members and groups like the Black Brilliance Advisory Council, showcases this commitment in action. This effort was recognized by Laura Mae Lindo, MPP for Kitchener Centre, as part of the Black Excellence in Leadership Academy (BELA) awards.

Deepa Ahluwalia, Human Rights and Equity Advisor was also recognized individually, for her sustained effort to keep attention on the important work of addressing systemic racism.

"It takes these leaders in the system to be able to do this work," said Lindo while presenting the award. "That is what you're doing Deepa, each and every day."



WRDSB Staff, Students and Community Members Recognized for Black Brilliance Work by Kitchener MPP

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 support of this commitment, the WRDSB was excited to announce the launch of the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Department in June of 2021. Within this department, there are three branches: Indigenous Education, Equity and Inclusion, and Human Rights.

The Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Department (IEHR) engages with students, staff, and community partners. As a department, their role is to provide support, informed advice, and monitoring for the development of an equity focussed culture that is rooted in human rights and recognizes Indigenous perspectives.



Announcing the Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Department

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.

To support staff as we all navigate an increasingly challenging time, we continue to offer staff a number of resources to support their wellness. In 2021, we introduced a new employee and family assistance plan (EFAP), which offers confidential support for staff and their families 24/7, 365 days a year. The EFAP also provides a library of articles, podcasts, tools and resources for when staff are looking to learn more about how to support their wellness.

Additional wellness resources are offered through the LifeSpeak video library. It has over 300 videos on a range of topics to help improve both physical and mental health. Accessible from anywhere, and at any time, these videos feature leading subject-matter experts to help guide WRDSB staff in supporting their wellness.

Begun in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, we continue to publish Supporting Ourselves, Supporting One Another – a publication shared with all WRDSB staff that contains a selection of resources on a variety of topics including mental health and well-being. Through a year where the ability to meet in-person has been limited, this offered a way to continue supporting staff learning and development with relevant, and current resources.



Supporting Staff and Supporting Our System

Our Stories



Celebrating Student Achievement and Graduation in a Pandemic



Anytime, Anyplace Computer Labs



Students Share What Black History Month Means To Them

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



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.

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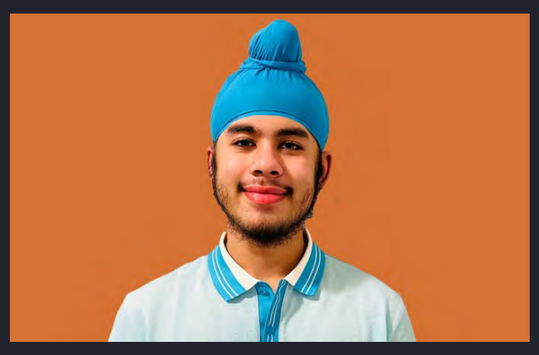
Mathematics

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.

Though we have all continued to navigate a global pandemic, the WRDSB's focus on mathematics has not wavered. Our educators and students continue to impress with their innovation in the classroom, and with their passion for using math to help solve real-world problems. Dina Orucevic, a Grade 12 student, used her passion for STEM to create an app to help drivers reduce their emissions while searching for an available parking spot. Hardit Singh, a Grade 10 student, focused his sights on improving global eye health with his invention of the Speculor device.

Ashley McCarl Palmer's innovation in her physics classroom garnered national attention, as she inspires the next generation of physicists and engineers.



Grade 10 Student Sets Sights on Global Eye Health



Passion for STEM Earns Student $100,000 Scholarship



Award-Winning Innovation in Physics Education

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.

Through 2021, our entire system shifted from in-person to remote learning a number of times, but we worked to ensure that student learning was not interrupted by these important public health measures.

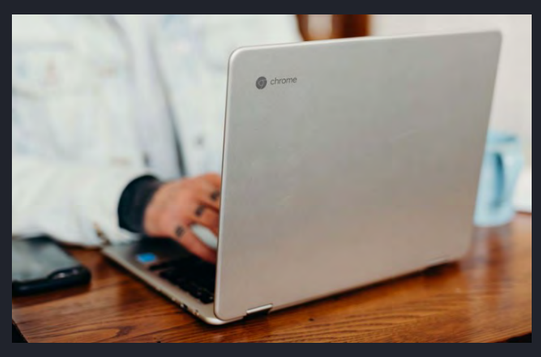
Our Information Technology Services teams demonstrated their passion for innovation by becoming the first school board in Canada to introduce Azure Virtual Desktops – a technology that allows students to access a high-performance complete modern desktop computer from any device, anywhere with an internet connection. Through AVD, students have equal access to tools such as AutoCad, Adobe Creative Suite, and the Microsoft Office Productivity Suite, all without needing physical access to a computer lab.

As we support students to reach the finish line on their pathways to graduation, we also celebrate them when they arrive at their journey's end. Each of our 16 secondary schools worked hard over a number of months planning their end-of-year celebrations for their graduating students – we know the graduates and their families so appreciated the chance to recognize their accomplishments while abiding by health and safety guidelines.

In addition to school-level activities, the WRDSB couldn't help but share just how proud we are of our graduates across Waterloo Region. It was hard to miss our excitement and pride, as our visual campaign extended to the sides of buses, to digital billboards, to the radio airwaves.



Celebrating Student Achievement and Graduation in a Pandemic



Anytime, Anyplace Computer Labs

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. It's clear to see that they carry these same goals with them in their learning and work in our schools.

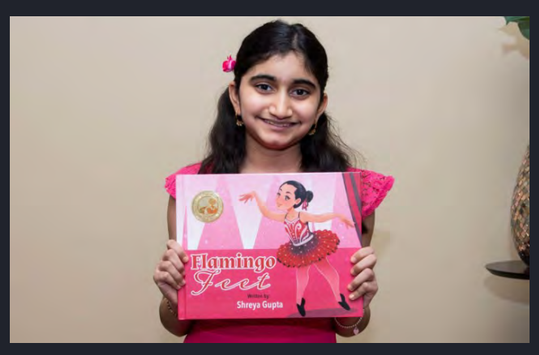
In February, we spoke with two student members of Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational School (KCI)'s African Heritage Club, Imani and Rahaf about what Black History Month means to them. The club organized a weekly virtual conference series, in addition to posting a selection of engaging and educational content on their Instagram account in February. Both students talked about the importance of continuing this learning and growth year-round, and not just for Black History Month.

Also in February, Shreya Gupta, a Grade 6 student, fundraised for Pink Shirt Day with her book, Flamingo Feet. The book tells the story of Aria, a young girl who encounters and overcomes bullying in her jazz dancing classes. All proceeds raised by the sales of the book throughout the month of February were donated to support anti-bullying work

Anna, a Grade 12 student at Bluevale Collegiate Institute (BCI) put her hair on the line to raise funds for Rainbow Railroad, an organization that helps LGBTQI people seek safe haven from violence and persecution. Quickly surpassing her first goal of $1,000 nearly 8 times over, Anna was excited to get out the hair clippers in support of a cause she cared about.



Students Share What Black History Month Means To Them



Student's Book Supports Anti-Bullying for Pink Shirt Day



Student's Hair On The Line for Rainbow Railroad

Our Stories



Announcing the Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Department

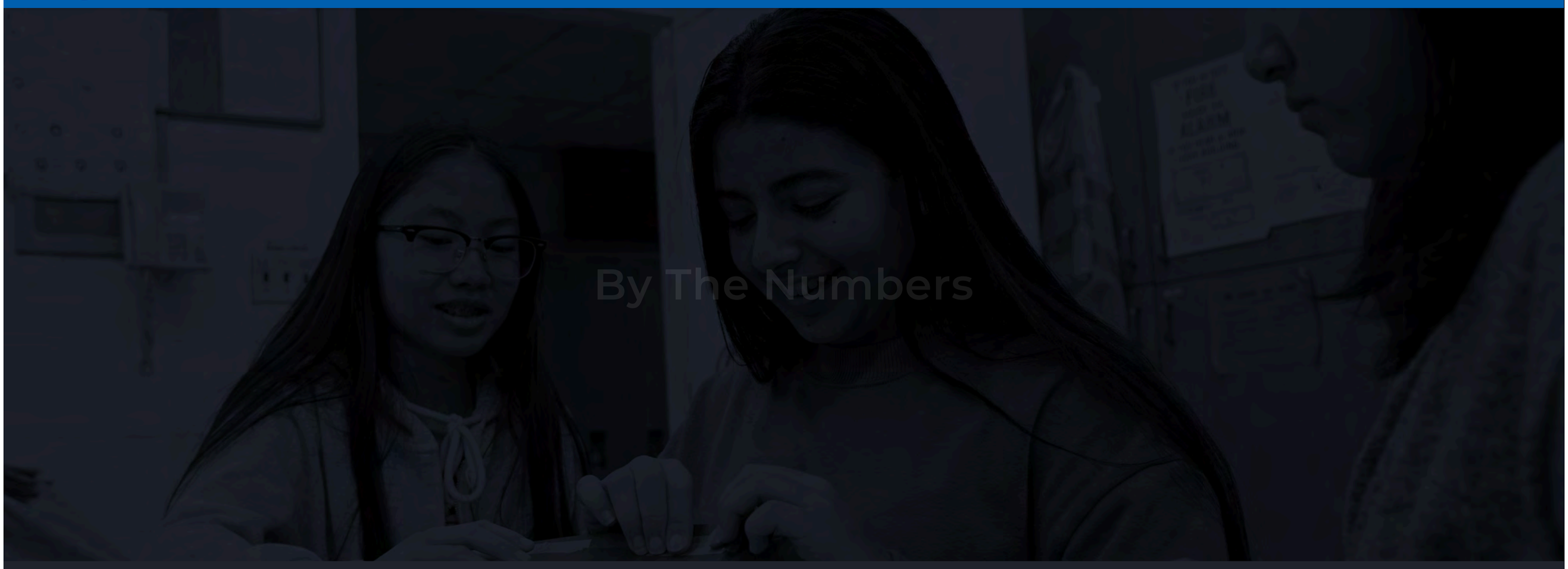


WRDSB Staff, Students and Community Members Recognized for Black Brilliance Work by Kitchener MPP



Volunteers Dig In at Two Cambridge Schools for Microforesting Effort

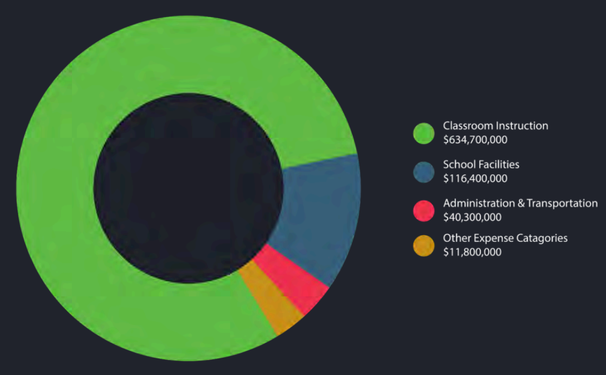
Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



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

On Wednesday, June 16, 2021, Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) trustees approved a balanced budget comprising $803.2M in expenditures, with a capital budget of $87.9M for the 2021-22 school year.

Financial Services worked closely with departments throughout the WRDSB to review budgets, making sure spending trends were analyzed and any necessary adjustments were made. The WRDSB benefitted from this review, ensuring we are well-positioned fiscally to address the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as any future pressures. The approved budget complies with provincial legislation, ensures the long-term fiscal stability of the board, and provides funding for new initiatives to continue to move the board forward and improve student achievement and well-being.



Enrollment in WRDSB

64,712
Total Students

44,343
Elementary Students

20,369
Secondary Students

105
Elementary Schools

16
Secondary Schools

93%
% of Primary Classes at 20 or less

18,106
First Language is NOT the language of Instruction*

860
Self-Identified First Nation, Metis, and Inuit Students**

1,420
Extended Day Enrolment

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

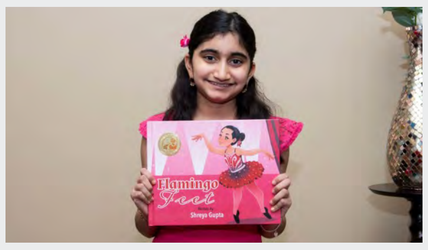
** Only those that volunteer this information are counted

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

Our Stories



Students Share What Black History Month Means To Them



Student's Book Supports Anti-Bullying for Pink Shirt Day



Student's Hair On The Line for Rainbow Railroad

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020

WRDSB Trustees



Scott Piatkowski

Role: Chairperson
Municipality: Waterloo / Wilmot
Phone: 519-577-2554
Email: scott_piatkowski@wrdsb.ca

In October 2018, I was honoured to have been chosen by the voters of Waterloo and Wilmot Township to represent them on the Waterloo Region District School Board. In December 2021, after serving for a year as Vice-Chair, I was acclaimed by my Trustee colleagues as Chairperson of the Board, which is an equally great honour.

I currently serve on the following committees:

- Agenda Development
- Director's Performance Appraisal
- Discipline
- French Immersion Review Ad Hoc
- Waterloo Education Foundation Inc. (WEFI) Board of Directors

Previously, I served on the School Resource Officer Review Ad Hoc Committee, the Suspension Review Ad Hoc Committee (as Co-Chair), and the Trustee Code of Conduct Review Committee. I also sit as the WRDSB's Voting Delegate and Alternate Director for the Ontario Public School Boards Association, and previously served on OPSBA's Policy Development Work Team.

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

In my professional life, I work for a national non-governmental organization that promotes the growth and sustainability of affordable housing communities across Canada. I have also served as the Vice-President of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada and as a volunteer facilitator with the Co-operative Young Leaders program.

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

View correspondence sent on behalf of the Chairperson of the Board of the Trustees.



Kathleen Woodcock

Role: Vice-Chair
Municipality: Waterloo / Wilmot
Phone: 226-929-3101
Email: kathleen_woodcock@wrdsb.ca

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). I am retired from 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.



Jayne Herring

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

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 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.



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.



Mike Ramsay

MUNICIPALITY: Kitchener
PHONE: 519-502-6449
EMAIL: mike_ramsay@wrdsb.ca

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
PHONE: 519-502-8656
EMAIL: kathi_smith@wrdsb.ca

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.

WATERLOO REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD



Cindy Watson

MUNICIPALITY: Cambridge / North Dumfries
PHONE: 519-503-0927
EMAIL: cindy_watson@wrdsb.ca

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.



Crystal Whetham

MUNICIPALITY: Cambridge / North Dumfries
PHONE: 226-747-5174
EMAIL: crystal_whetham@wrdsb.ca

I am honoured to be one of your elected trustees for Cambridge/North Dumfries.

My 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.



Joanne Weston

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.

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020

WRDSB Senior Team

jeewan chanicka
Director of Education & Secretary of the Board

Lila Read
Associate Director

Matthew Gerard
Coordinating Superintendent, Business Services & Treasurer of the Board

Graham Shantz
Coordinating Superintendent, Human Resource & Equity Services
Coordinating Superintendent, Information Technology Services (interim)

Ron DeBoer
Superintendent – Student Achievement and Well-Being

Evelyn Giannopoulos
Superintendent – Student Achievement and Well-Being

Pam Kaur
Superintendent – Student Achievement and Well-Being

Scott Miller
Superintendent – Student Achievement and Well-Being

Jodi Albrecht
Superintendent – Student Achievement and Well-Being

Crissa Hill
Superintendent – Student Achievement and Well-Being

Bill Lemon
Superintendent – Student Achievement and Well-Being

Della Lataille-Herdsman
Superintendent – Student Achievement and Well-Being

Deepa Ahluwalia
Human Rights & Equity Advisor

Eusis Dougan-McKenzie
Chief Communications Officer (interim)

Dana Liebermann
Senior Manager, Research and Evidence-based Practice

Carol Dey
Senior Manager, Human Resources Services

Justin Brown
Senior Manager, Human Resource Services

John Veit
Controller, Facility Services

Nick Landry
Controller, Financial Services

Ivana MacIsaac
Senior Manager, Information Technology Services

Ron Dallan
Manager of Capital Projects

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Anishinaabemowin Language Program

As a part of our ongoing commitment to support Indigenous students, families and communities, we were proud to launch our Anishinaabemowin Language Program on December 11, 2021. This non-credit class, part of the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) International and Indigenous Languages Program (IILP), is open to students in Grades 1-12 and adults.

Nikki Shawana, a member of the Odawa nation, Eagle clan, leads the Anishinaabemowin language classes and hopes this program provides an opportunity that she did not have when she was in school.

“I’m so excited that the Waterloo Region District School Board is offering this program…because I know what it’s like growing up in southern Ontario and going to school here,” Shawana said to CBC-KW in December. “When I went to school, there was no access to Anishinaabemowin programs anywhere. There was no chance or opportunity, really, for you to learn if you were in southern Ontario and not close to an Anishinaabe community.”

For Shawana, the virtual nature of the program is especially important, as it opens the door for more people to sign up, and get started on learning about the Anishinaabemowin language and culture.

So what can students expect from this course? Shawana explained that they’ll be starting with a focus on the sounds used in the language. Once students learn each of the sounds included on a sound chart, they’ll have the building blocks to say any word in Anishinaabemowin.

“We’re really starting from the beginning, really starting from the basics,” They’re starting from square one, Shawana explained, hoping to make this course approachable for anyone who is interested.

If you’re interested in signing up to learn more about Anishinaabemowin language and culture, check out the link below:

Register for the Anishinaabemowin Language Program

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Announcing the Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Department

In June 2021, the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) announced the launch of the Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights (IEHR) Department. Within this department, there are three branches: Indigenous Education, Equity and Inclusion, and Human Rights.

Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Department

The Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Department (IEHR) engages with students, staff, and community partners. As a department, their role is to provide support, informed advice, and monitoring for the development of an equity focussed culture that is rooted in human rights and recognizes Indigenous perspectives.

Through a decolonizing, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive lens, the IEHR Department cultivates capacity across the WRDSB to address systemic barriers and build a community culture that is safe, equitable, and just for students and staff.

We value respect for all. We acknowledge the diversity of lived experiences based on our social identity and privilege. Through compassion and collaboration, we innovate in how we address systemic oppression.

The WRDSB is committed to meeting its obligation under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Ontario Human Rights Code by providing inclusive, safe and caring schools and workplaces that respect the rights of every individual.

The Branches

Indigenous Education Branch

Indigenous Education Branch staff work to support students and staff by building system capacity to understand Indigenous histories, current realities, and ways of knowing. This branch also works to engage Indigenous communities to support the success of Indigenous students.

Equity and Inclusion Branch

Equity and Inclusion Branch staff work in direct support of school administrators and school staff in the development of school improvement strategies, enhanced and inclusive curriculum and supporting all components of the conditions for learning framework.

Human Rights Branch

The Human Rights Branch works with objectivity and independence from other system structures for the purpose of addressing matters specific to the Ontario Human Rights Code (the Code) including Code-related harassment and discrimination complaints. It also supports the development and review of Board Policies and Procedures to ensure compliance with the Code.

Resources and Supports

Territorial Acknowledgement

You will find the WRDSB Territorial Acknowledgement on each of the IEHR pages, along with a link to a page with more information about this important acknowledgement, and resources to help begin an ongoing process toward understanding our relationship to this land.

Policies

On the Policies page, you will find our policy documents that build on the legislative foundation and guide the development and implementation of all policies, programs, and structures to ensure consistency with the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Legislation

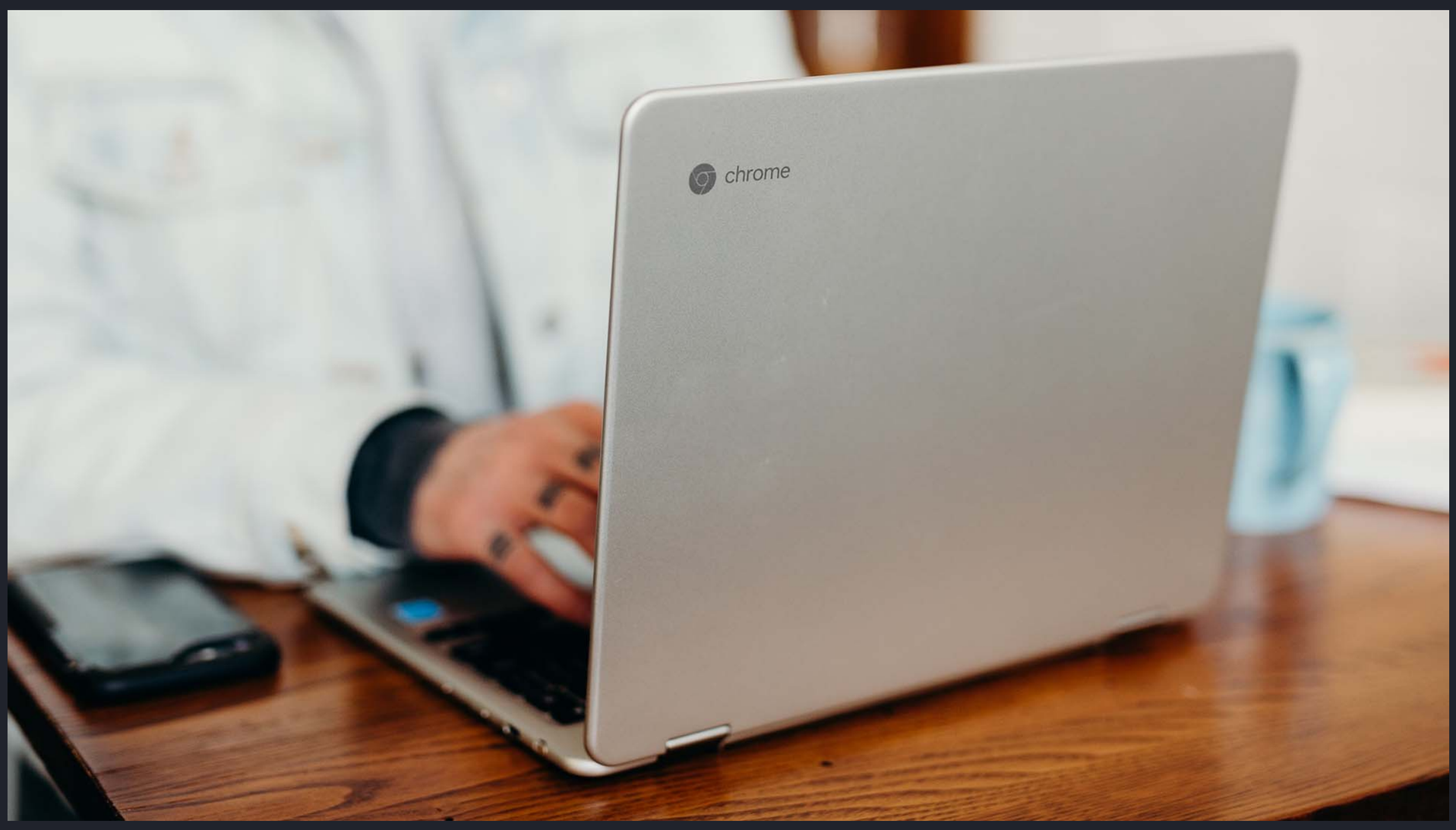
On the Legislation page, you will find the legislative documents which provide the foundation of our commitment to Indigenous education, equity, and human rights.

Human Rights Incident Reporting Form

The Human Rights Incident Reporting Form is available to any members of the Board community to report a complaint, issue, or matter of discrimination or harassment that is believed to go against the Board's Human Rights Policy. Submitting an Incident Reporting Form does not start a complaint resolution process – it notifies the Human Rights Branch of the incident and a member of the HRB team will follow up to explore appropriate next steps.

Interested in learning more about the work of the IEHR Department? Explore our pages on the WRDSB website, and see all the resources available to the WRDSB community.

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Anytime, Anyplace Computer Labs

As the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) navigated periods of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, seamless access to the same resources at home, as students had at school was key. As a solution, the IT team chose Microsoft's Azure Virtual Desktop (AVD), which allows students to access a high-performance complete modern desktop computer from any device, anywhere with an internet connection. In doing so, the WRDSB became the first school board in Canada to implement this innovative approach.

For students pursuing their individual pathways to graduation, this technology helped to ensure they were able to access the tools and software they needed to continue their learning and to prepare them for their next step. Most importantly, it ensured equity of access to computing equipment and resources for students learning remotely at home and in-person at school.

Through AVD, students have equal access to tools such as AutoCad, Adobe Creative Suite, and the Microsoft Office Productivity Suite, all without needing physical access to a computer lab. This allowed students pursuing a pathway to graduation in the technical fields to continue to participate in their programs, even remotely. Before the introduction of AVD, these students would have been unable to access the tools they needed to continue their learning outside of school.

Beyond supporting student learning, AVD has supported staff in their work, by allowing them to access internal resources away from their office or school.

"Azure Virtual Desktops provided our secondary students and educators access to high-performance computer resources without the need to physically be in one of our schools," said Ivana MacIsaac, senior manager in Information Technology Services in the WRDSB."This provided in-person and remote learning students access to the same resources."

MacIsaac added, "We now have over 250 classes with more than 5200 students actively using the virtual resources and we continue to receive requests from different educators to extend access for new courses."

As the WRDSB looks to the future, the commitment to supporting student learning in any scenario, and equity of access remains strong. With a plan to add to the software library, and broaden existing resources in the AVD, this new tool will allow more students and schools to access the software they need to support their learning and to pursue their interests on their pathway to graduation.

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Award-Winning Innovation in Physics Education

A passion for innovation and providing real-world learning opportunities in a gradeless classroom has made a Waterloo educator an award winner, and will likely take her to the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) at CERN in Europe.

Ashley McCarl Palmer, a physics teacher at Waterloo Collegiate Institute (WCI), won the 2021 CAP Award for Excellence in Teaching High School/CEGEP Physics (Ontario). Presented by the Canadian Association of Physicists (CAP), the award recognizes excellence in teaching physics in Canadian high schools.



When she first heard the news, McCarl Palmer was elated to have been chosen and to now find her name amongst the great Canadian physics educators.

“To be included in their circle was a pretty high honour,” said McCarl Palmer. “I have a bit of imposter syndrome.”

As time went on though, McCarl Palmer began to see the power of the award, in supporting the innovative approach she takes to teaching physics to her students. An approach that, in the past, was not always met with cheers of encouragement.

“It kind of validated what I am doing,” said McCarl Palmer. “It just gave me the confidence to keep going.”

Beyond the recognition and support for her teaching methods, this award also presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: the chance to attend the summer teaching institute at CERN, home to the Large Hadron Collider (LHC), in Europe.

“CERN is like number one on my bucket list,” said McCarl Palmer.

Winning this award puts her within shouting distance of this goal, as only one of the regional winners of the CAP award is chosen to attend on behalf of Canada. Doubling her chances, McCarl Palmer applied and was accepted separately to attend as a Canadian delegate. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this program has been put on hold, but she looks forward to attending in 2022.

“All I had ever dreamt of was going to CERN and now I have two avenues to get there,” said McCarl Palmer. “That’s the plan for summer 2022.”

She should be right at home at CERN, though, as McCarl Palmer’s classroom is just about as cutting-edge.

McCarl Palmer made three major shifts in her approach over the past five years, which were part of the reason she was recognized by the CAP: She has gone gradeless in her approach to assessment, she has expanded her students’ physics toolkits and she has adopted “thinking classroom” strategies.



The move to a gradeless approach was because she found that “students were focusing on the marks, and not actually the learning or understanding what was going on in the classroom.” By taking the percentages and letter grades away, students are able to focus on what they did well, and where they made mistakes. The process of making corrections and identifying errors becomes a learning opportunity. It all contributes to creating an environment where students feel safe making mistakes – and learning from them.

Expanding her students’ toolkits for understanding physics involved moving beyond mathematics – just one of the tools to solve in physics. She connects problems to the real world and allows students to use words and visuals to hypothesize and demonstrate understanding. Ultimately, the aim is to provide a more complete understanding of what is happening, beyond the realm of math alone.

“I’m constantly trying to give them context and real-world connections,” said McCarl Palmer.

Creating a “thinking classroom” means an emphasis on collaborative learning and group work. The focus is not just on students demonstrating their knowledge, but also on how well ideas are communicated and tested. These skills prepare students for the workplace and for success in life beyond school.

“It’s all about collaborative problem solving, communicating ideas, grabbing tools from many places and relying on different backgrounds,” said McCarl Palmer. “I think that it’s more indicative of 21st-century learning and skills.”

Together, these factors create a classroom culture where students feel safe wrestling with a problem, leaning on their classmates for support and taking risks on their way to uncovering a better understanding of physics. It leads to situations where students are able to reach those moments of sudden realization – and deeper understanding. It’s what McCarl Palmer is all about.

“My favourite thing about teaching is the ‘lightbulb moments.’ I live for those moments.”

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Celebrating Student Achievement and Graduation in a Pandemic

2021 was an incredibly challenging year for many in our schools, and in our community. With this in mind, we wanted to ensure our students knew just how proud we are of all they have accomplished while navigating the ever-changing landscape of COVID-19.

Staff and students came together, both in-person while maintaining health and safety standards, and virtually to mark the end of the school year, and celebrate those students reaching milestones on their learning journeys.

Of course, we could not forget about the Grade 12 graduates who were about to take the next step on their chosen pathways. Graduating from secondary school has always represented a milestone achievement. It represents 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 was more important than ever before.

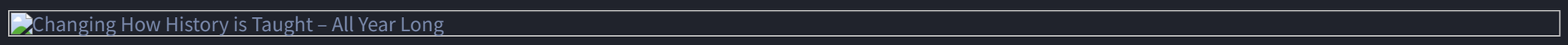
Each of our 16 secondary schools worked hard over a number of months planning their end-of-year celebrations for their graduating students – we know the graduates and their families so appreciated the chance to recognize their accomplishments while abiding by health and safety guidelines.

In addition to school-level activities, the WRDSB couldn't help but share just how proud we are of our graduates across Waterloo Region. It was hard to miss our excitement and pride, as our visual campaign extended to the sides of buses, to digital billboards, to the radio airwaves.

Minister of Education Stephen Lecce joined us in celebrating and recognizing our students and their achievements. A selection of video messages congratulated students who were making milestone transitions, including those in Kindergarten, Grade 6, Grade 8 and Grade 12.

We are so proud of all of our graduates, and indeed all of our students who successfully completed an incredibly challenging year. #WeAreWRDSB

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Changing How History is Taught – All Year Long

A passion for history is what brought Chris Ashley to teaching, and it's what keeps him at it 23 years after he first joined the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB). The educator from Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational School (KCI) isn't shy about the fact that part of his motivation came as a result of how few Black teachers he saw. He remembered having one, in Grade 7, during his time in school.

"The lack of representation of people that look like me in schools" was part of what inspired him, said Ashley. The path wasn't an easy one. He was met with doubt, and barriers on his path to become a teacher. It only served to push him forward.

"I can do that, I will do that," Ashley said. "Just watch me."

For more than 10 years, Ashley has served as one of the staff sponsors of the African Heritage Club, along with his colleague, Carol Pinnock, a French language teacher. The two share a passion for education and what began as an effort to organize annual events celebrating Black History Month, has now evolved to support students and events year-round. For Ashley, this was an important step in recognizing the contributions of Black people throughout the school year and within every subject area.

"This is not a once a year event," said Ashley. "We're Black every day. There's Black history every day."

Now meeting online weekly, Ashley explained that all students are welcome to join the African Heritage Club.

"From an anthropological viewpoint, the human race originated in Africa," said Ashley. "So, guess what? Everybody is involved in this club."

The dedication of the staff and students involved in the African Heritage Club has not gone unnoticed. In August 2020, the group was awarded $5,000 from the African Heritage Initiative – money they have used to create a bursary to support students with the pursuit of their post-secondary pathways.

Although he has spent most of his career helping to change how history is taught at KCI and in the WRDSB, Ashley is now taking his expertise to a wider audience. Working in conjunction with a number of colleagues from across the province and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF), he is helping to assemble the Canadian Black Lives Curriculum.

The resource, which will exist as a website in its final form, will provide curriculum connections for every subject area to assist teachers as they include this content in their teaching. Created by experts from each area of study, and with connections to Ontario's curriculum, teachers can trust these resources and apply them in any of their courses.

"In a sense, we're pointing them in the right direction," said Ashley. "We're connecting the curriculum documents to make it easier…for teachers to put it into their work."

Doing this work during an unprecedented global pandemic has, no question, been challenging. However, Ashley explained that the journey has "been a very enriching experience." Having the opportunity to reach out and offer advice and guidance on such a large scale is not one he wanted to miss.

His work, both in his classroom and outside of it, continues to shape his approach to teaching. Ashley's classroom was never a place where you would receive the traditional, Euro-centric version of history. "You're going to get more of a people approach, rather than military approach," he said.

Students often remark how many new, different parts of history they learn as a result of this method. It fills in the gaps and offers new perspectives on events and time periods already covered in many history courses.

"The more you learn, you realize, there is more to learn," said Ashley.

Ashley's practice was shaped, in part, by an experience he had while in university. With two Jamaican parents who immigrated to Canada in 1970, he explained that striving for high levels of education was a goal, as much as an expectation. Ashley's parents didn't expect him to achieve this alone, though, and were ardent supporters throughout his academic journey – which included his time in post-secondary education.

A professor at his campus made a statement that women and Black people did not have a place in history. Moved to action, he began working as part of a group of students in response to the statement. He understood the need to ensure all students received an accurate, complete view of history that acknowledged and recognized the role and experiences of all people.

Ashley's drive as a lifelong learner to gain a fuller understanding of history has taken him many places – whether it be continuing to grow his qualifications through courses or post-graduate studies at the University of Waterloo.

"I have made it a point to absorb many different aspects of education to continue enriching myself and my students," said Ashley.

One course, led by Dr. Christopher Taylor at UW, offered a chance at an extraordinary field trip to Ghana, West Africa. For Ashley, it was more than the opportunity to visit monuments and museums – it was a chance to connect with his own ancestral roots and learn more about his cultural heritage.

"I always had it in the back of my mind, that I would love to go to see the motherland," said Ashley. "I wanted to touch the land that my ancestors walked on."

When it's safe to travel, he encourages his students, and anyone who is interested, not to miss that opportunity.

"You want to go beyond the pages in the textbook," said Ashley. "Go explore."

The value of these experiences is more than personal for Ashley. He sees the richness and inspiration they allow him to bring to his teaching, to his classroom and to his students. The sum of his continued learning has helped to reinforce his belief in providing the full version of history to students.

"I have been very blatant about not sugar-coating history," said Ashley, explaining that it's important that students understand the true context of what occurred, even though some of it may be startling to learn. He is always careful to prepare his students, and set the stage to discuss these types of subjects.

"These are some heavy topics," said Ashley. His aim is to create a brave space for these discussions in his classroom, rather than having students encounter them later in life.

The focus, for Ashley, remains on equipping students to succeed during their time at KCI and beyond. His efforts are working, as can be clearly seen looking at the students who are members of the African Heritage Club. They shifted their efforts online to celebrate Black History Month, using their Instagram page to connect with audiences across the WRDSB.

"They've developed and found their voices," said Ashley. "I feel really inspired by that."

This feeling helps Ashley remain focused on his work and his purpose as an educator.

"I have a job to educate, and I will educate young and old. I'm going to keep doing this until I have to retire," he said with a laugh.

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Grade 10 Student Sets Sights on Global Eye Health

For Hardit Singh, a Grade 10 student at Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute in Kitchener, his journey in improving global eye health began when a friend's detached retina went misdiagnosed. This sparked Singh's interest in ophthalmology, a branch of medicine that deals with the diagnosis and treatment of disorders of the eye.

"That really got me interested — like, if this can happen in a richer and more developed area like Waterloo, what could the conditions be like in other areas which don't have as much access?" Singh said to CBC Kitchener-Waterloo in September.

This led to Singh's invention of Speculor and a second-place finish at the European Union Contest for Young Scientists. Speculor is a hand-held portable imager that photographs a patient's eye, and uses artificial intelligence (AI) to screen for disease.



Importantly, the Speculor costs just a fraction of other comparable medical devices, at approximately $300. Similar devices can cost up to $5,000.

The portable design would allow medical workers in the field to bring it with them to remote locations and test a large number of patients at once. This would help to improve access to care for those all around the world. Globally, at least 2.2 billion people have a near or distance vision impairment. In at least 1 billion – or almost half – of these cases, vision impairment could have been prevented or has yet to be addressed, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

"I'm trying to help people have the ability to see," said Singh.

So what's next for Singh? He hopes to launch a company to help bring the Speculor device to fruition and to make it available for use around the world.

In the near future, he is setting his sights on the Canadian Physics Olympiad, a test designed to identify students who have a talent for physics and prepare them for participation in the International Physics Olympiad.

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020

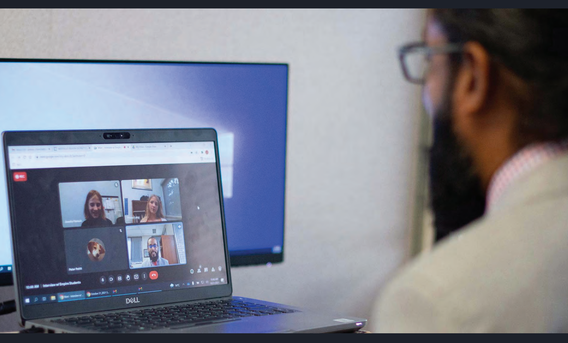




Junior Journalists and jeewan: Listening and Learning from Student Voice

It may be his first year as Director of Education with the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), but a few young and up-and-coming journalists weren't afraid to bring the tough questions to jeewan chanicka.

In October, Amelia and Vivian, two Grade 6 students from Empire Public School in Waterloo, had the chance to ask the Director of Education their burning questions for an article in their school newspaper. For chanicka, it was an opportunity to hear directly from WRDSB students, about what matters to them.



A question from Vivian stood out in particular, as she asked chanicka what was his "vision for schools and students moving forward and where does [he] see the greatest overall need for change?"

The public education system as it currently exists, chanicka explained, is a system from a different era.

"We're using infrastructure that is from the 19th century for schools, today, in this century," he said. "That doesn't make a lot of sense to me."

The challenge, for chanicka, is to rethink and change public education to help students reach their fullest potential. A key factor is ensuring that schools are safe for everyone to show up and be their whole selves.

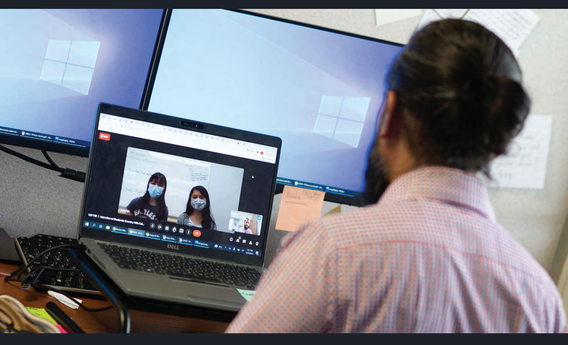
"When that happens, the learning becomes easy," said chanicka. "People feel appreciated for who they are."

Continuing to look to the future, Vivian asked chanicka, "If a brand new young teacher were to approach you and ask you what you feel is the most important thing in teaching, what would you tell them?"

As part of preparing students for this world, and their future in it, chanicka sees opportunities for students to focus their learning on answering big questions that are connected to real-world issues.

Learning in this way will better equip students to approach the problems and questions they will face as they enter the working world in the future, and ultimately, shape their own futures, too.

"You're going to be the leaders," chanicka told the students.



In December, chanicka was interviewed by Sona and Kayna, two members of the Newspaper Club at Country Hills Public School in Kitchener. List of queries in hand, they dove right in, asking chanicka how he would explain his job to elementary students.

"I work to try and make the best decisions to help the schools be the best schools they can be and to support students to be the best that they can be," said chanicka.

He helped them understand the size of the WRDSB, and how he envisions his role serving the students that learn and grow in its schools every day. Although some may see him as the boss, chanicka explained that he sees himself working for students.

"We have 122 schools and we serve about 65,000 students," said chanicka. "I work for all of you. So you are my bosses"

Director chanicka explained he sees an important part of his job to ensure that education meets the needs of all students.

"It helps some, and that's a good thing," said chanicka. "But, it hasn't helped all students."

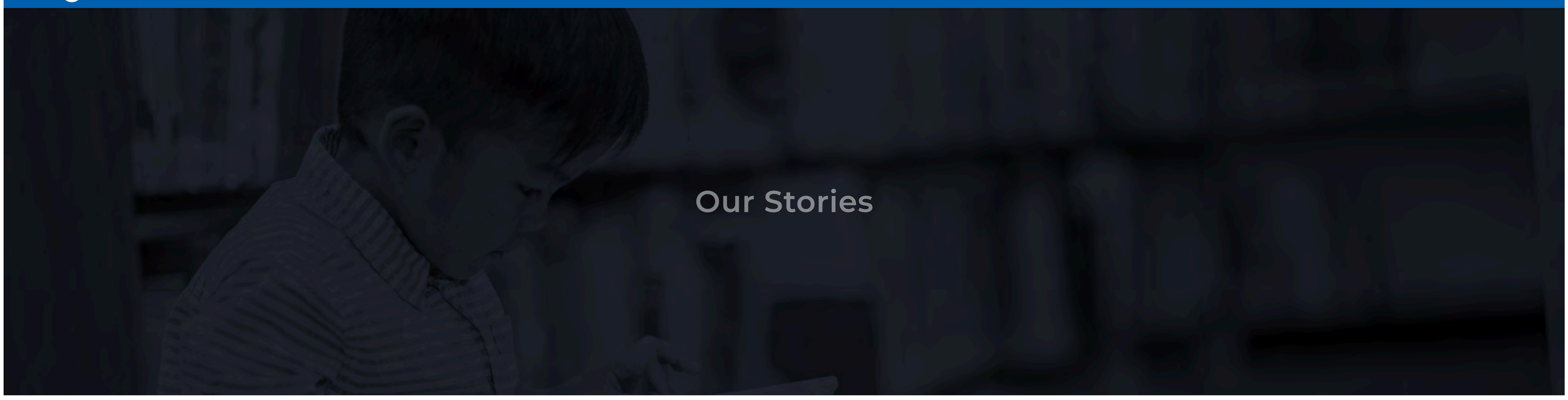


This is a focus that lies at the heart of chanicka's work as director of education at the WRDSB. To help illustrate this purpose, he showed the students a painting he made that hangs above his desk. The image is of a sunflower, accompanied by the text, "in every seed there is potential".

The path to achieving this involves reimagining our understanding of what an education system looks like, how students learn and where learning can take place. This includes an increased opportunity for student voice and student-directed learning.

Although their conversations were brief, it was clear that they made an impact on all parties involved. For chanicka, he made it clear just how important the opportunity to connect directly with students is.

"I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed talking to all of you," said chanicka. "This is the highlight of my day."



Our Stories



Anishinaabemowin Language Program

Anishinaabemowin Language Program As a part of our ongoing commitment to support Indigenous students, families and communities, we were proud to launch our Anishinaabemowin Language Program on December 11, 2021. This



Junior Journalists and jeewan: Listening and Learning from Student Voice

Junior Journalists and jeewan: Listening and Learning from Student Voice It may be his first year as Director of Education with the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), but a few



Supporting Staff and Supporting Our System

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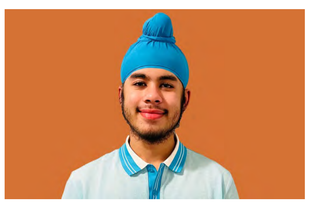
Celebrating Student Achievement and Graduation in a Pandemic

Celebrating Student Achievement and Graduation in a Pandemic 2021 was an incredibly challenging year for many in our schools, and in our community. With this in mind, we wanted to ensure



Anytime, Anyplace Computer Labs

Anytime, Anyplace Computer Labs As the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) navigated periods of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, seamless access to the same resources at home, as students



Grade 10 Student Sets Sights on Global Eye Health

Grade 10 Student Sets Sights on Global Eye Health For Hardit Singh, a Grade 10 student at Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute in Kitchener, his journey in improving global eye health began



Announcing the Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Department

Announcing the Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Department In June 2021, the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) announced the launch of the Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights (IEHR) Department. Within



WRDSB Staff, Students and Community Members Recognized for Black Brilliance Work by Kitchener MPP

WRDSB Staff, Students and Community Members Recognized for Black Brilliance Work by Kitchener MPP On Sunday, March 21, Laura Mae Lindo, MPP for Kitchener Centre, invited members of the community to



Volunteers Dig In at Two Cambridge Schools for Microforesting Effort

Volunteers Dig In at Two Cambridge Schools for Microforesting Effort On the brisk morning of Saturday, November 6, undeterred by the cold temperatures, volunteers came together to plant 170 trees at

Changing How History is Taught – All Year Long

Changing How History is Taught – All Year Long A passion for history is what brought Chris Ashley to teaching, and it's what keeps him at it 23 years after he first



Students Share What Black History Month Means To Them

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Student's Book Supports Anti-Bullying for Pink Shirt Day

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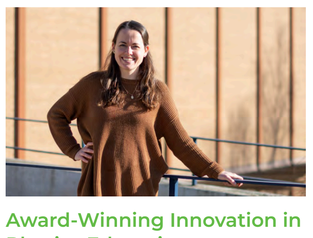
Student's Hair On The Line for Rainbow Railroad

Student's Hair On The Line for Rainbow Railroad Anna Wienburg, a Grade 12 student at Bluevale Collegiate Institute (BCI) in Waterloo, put her hair on the line to raise funds for



Passion for STEM Earns Student $100,000 Scholarship

Passion for STEM Earns Student $100,000 Scholarship Dina Orucevic, a Grade 12 student at Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational School (KCI), wasn't expecting to find anything out of the ordinary when she



Award-Winning Innovation in Physics Education

Award-Winning Innovation in Physics Education A passion for innovation and providing real-world learning opportunities in a gradeless classroom has made a Waterloo educator an award winner, and will likely take her

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Passion for STEM Earns Student $100,000 Scholarship

Dina Orucevic, a Grade 12 student at Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational School (KCI), wasn't expecting to find anything out of the ordinary when she checked her email. What she found was life-changing.

"I was in shock. No words," said Orucevic. "I had my sister pinch me, I had to check if it was in my junk mail, I had to check if the email was addressed to another person. But, no. It was all mine."

The unexpected email informed her that she'd been selected to receive a Schulich Leader Scholarship, valued at $100,000. These entrance scholarships are awarded to high school graduates each year, enrolling in a science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) undergraduate program at 20 partner universities in Canada.

The feeling of shock hadn't worn off yet for Orucevic, even as she turned her focus towards her next challenge. She'll be studying Systems Design Engineering at the University of Waterloo – continuing to pursue her passion for STEM at the post-secondary level. Orucevic is excited for what lies ahead, although her interests were not always focused in the engineering field.

"I was all over the place. From French Immersion studies to business management, to tech," Orucevic said of her time in secondary school.

It was volunteering at a KCI STEM competition that first got her involved in these subjects, and drove her desire to learn more. This journey led her to win both the gold and bronze medals at a province-wide STEM competition for the creation of an app that helps drivers reduce their emissions while searching for an available parking spot.

For Orucevic, it wasn't about winning, but instead the new skills and knowledge of her own ability to learn and grow. To help equip herself for this competition, she set about learning javascript, HTML and CSS.

"Winning wasn't the most important part," said Orucevic. "It's the journey."

It was exactly this kind of self-motivation that made Orucevic stand out to the committee of KCI guidance staff who select nominees, explained Rhonda Gauthier, head of the guidance department. As part of her application to be considered for the scholarship, "…she wrote about when she first saw that advertisement for the STEM competition," said Gauthier. Orucevic described her feeling of intimidation looking at the work other students put forward, and her lack of coding experience. Undeterred, she focused on building her skill toolbox and "…just dug in and decided she was going to do it."

It goes beyond just one subject area. Orucevic's involvement in a wide variety of subjects, sports and extracurricular activities at KCI was an important part of helping her stand out.

"She has involvement in leadership, in sports, in community, and piano," said Gauthier.

Orucevic is especially interested in promoting the representation of women in STEM. She recalled the first tech course she took in secondary school, in which female students were few in number. Orucevic is focused on creating more opportunities for students like herself. With this in mind, she volunteered at Technica, the world's largest all-women and non-binary hackathon.

As she prepared to take on her next adventure, Orucevic shared some words of wisdom for future students who are looking to follow their interests and build a foundation for success.

"I would just say…stay positive, stay motivated, stay passionate," said Orucevic. "Whatever you put your mind to, you'll be able to do."

About Schulich Leader Scholarships Canada

Recognizing the increasing importance and impact that STEM disciplines will have on the prosperity of future generations, businessman and philanthropist Seymour Schulich established this $100+ million scholarship fund in 2012 to encourage our best and brightest students to become Schulich Leader Scholars: the next generation of entrepreneurial-minded, technology innovators.

Through The Schulich Foundation, these prestigious entrance scholarships are awarded to 100 high school graduates this year, enrolling in a science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) undergraduate program at 20 partner universities in Canada. Every high school in Canada can submit one Schulich Leader Nominee per academic year based on academic excellence in STEM, entrepreneurial leadership and financial need.

For more information visit: schulichleaders.com

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Student's Book Supports Anti-Bullying for Pink Shirt Day

For Shreya Gupta, being creative comes naturally. When she's not sketching, painting or reading, she explained there is one place you'll find her. "On the laptop, just writing some stories for fun."

With a desire to help make a difference for other children, in Canada and around the world, she put her love for writing into action. The result is Flamingo Feet – which tells the story of Aria, a young girl who encounters bullying in her jazz dancing classes. The book tells the story of her overcoming her bullies and finding confidence in herself to showcase her dancing skills on stage.

Flamingo Feet does more than just inspire its readers to find the strength and courage to stand up for themselves. All proceeds raised by the sales of the book throughout the month of February will be donated to support anti-bullying work. Throughout the rest of the year, proceeds support various charities that help young girls access education in third-world countries.

Shreya, a Grade 6 student, was inspired to support the education of children in need after a trip to India.

"It made me sad," said Shreya. "I wanted to help them."

For Pink Shirt Day, Shreya had the idea to focus her efforts on supporting anti-bullying work. She explained how the story of the origins of Pink Shirt Day moved her, especially how the students worked together to overcome bullying through the powerful image of all wearing pink.

"It's really important because it really advocates standing up to bullying," said Shreya.

Raising funds to support anti-bullying bullying work felt like a natural connection, and it makes her happy to know that her story is supporting children like her who experience bullying.

"It makes me feel amazing, it makes me feel very proud," said Shreya. "My goal to help people is happening."



Shreya's family couldn't be prouder. Her mom, Sonia, saw Shreya's generous spirit and her drive to make a difference from a young age. Writing a book with the goal of inspiring readers to stand up to bullying, and donating the proceeds only took this focus to the next level.

"When Shreya decided to step up and write this book, it was amazing," said Sonia. "We're very proud of her."

For Sonia, it's been about supporting Shreya as she pursues her curiosity and interests. She could never have imagined where it has taken her.

"I'm honoured to be her mom, and to watch her grow," said Sonia. "I can't wait to see where she goes from here."

Shreya remains focused on making the world a better place and hopes that her book helps people of all ages to find the confidence to believe in themselves and stand up to bullies.

"It's really important to always believe in yourself," said Shreya. "Always follow your dreams, no matter what people say."

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Student’s Hair On The Line for Rainbow Railroad

Anna Wienburg, a Grade 12 student at Bluevale Collegiate Institute (BCI) in Waterloo, put her hair on the line to raise funds for Rainbow Railroad, an organization that helps LGBTQI people seek safe haven from violence and persecution. Wienburg pledged to shave off all her hair if she hit the initial goal of $1,000. With that goal well surpassed, Wienburg was ready to get out the hair clippers.

“The initial goal has been hit, so, I’m doing it,” said Wienburg with a laugh. “I’m ready for the change. I am looking forward to it.”

Deciding to support Rainbow Railroad happened almost by chance, with Wienburg stumbling across information about the organization while scrolling through social media. Immediately, she was struck by the need to support their work.

“I just found them, out of the blue,” said Wienburg. “Perfect timing.”

Rainbow Railroad works around the world to help LGBTQI+ people escape state-sponsored violence. In over 70 countries around the world, LGBTQI+ people face violence and oppression simply because of who they love or who they are.

“It is absolutely ludicrous to me,” said Wienburg.

Since the organization’s founding, they’ve helped over 1,600 individuals find safety through emergency relocation and other forms of assistance. For Wienburg, this mission is one worth supporting – even if it means shaving her head to make it happen.

“I feel very privileged, as a queer person, living in Canada,” said Wienburg. “I can be out. I can be proud. My family supports me. My community supports me.”

Wienburg recalled that the idea to shave her head as a fundraiser began as a result of her own indecision on the matter. Being able to raise money for a cause she believed in was the reason she needed to make it happen.

“This gave me the motivation to shave my head, while doing a really cool thing for Pride month,” she said.

While the reaction from many was shock when hearing that her characteristic curls will be disappearing, all are supportive of her choice to support Rainbow Railroad while doing so. She was caught off guard by how quickly she reached her initial goal, and was surprised to see how generous members of her family, her peers and members of the community have been.

Rainbow Railroad themselves caught wind of Wienburg’s fundraiser, and wanted to share what a difference her efforts are making for those they support.

“Rainbow Railroad is a grassroots non-profit organization dependent upon the incredible support of communities of LGBTQI+ people and their allies across Canada and indeed around the world,” said Eric Wright, communications officer with Rainbow Railroad, who also had a special message for Wienburg. “Anna, you are not just supporting Rainbow Railroad, you’re part of our movement for human rights for all LGBTQI+ people globally.”

Wienburg remains focused on continuing to gather support for the work of Rainbow Railroad, so that all may live in safety and security, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics.

“I wish all queer people had the safety and security that I feel like I have,” said Wienburg. “I know I am very lucky to have that and I want to try to spread that to as many people as possible.”

Donate to Anna Wienburg’s Fundraiser

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Students Share What Black History Month Means To Them

How do you spend Black History Month? Two students, Imani van Gaalen and Rahaf Abdelrahman both from Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational School (KCI), shared their thoughts about how they see the month as an important opportunity for meaningful learning, and commitment to action year-round.

Abdelrahman, a Grade 10 student, and van Gaalen, a Grade 11 student, are both members of KCI's African Heritage Club, a group of students and staff mentors who are committed to learning about and celebrating the cultures and stories of the African diaspora all year-round. Throughout Black History Month, the club hosted a virtual conference series every Thursday, in addition to posting a selection of engaging and educational content on their Instagram account.

The club worked quickly to transition their work online, navigating the added challenges presented by COVID-19, explained van Gaalen. Although it has meant they were unable to come together in person, the silver lining of the online approach is that it made communicating with a wider audience possible, allowing them to reach people outside of the KCI school community.



"I think that we've been able to accomplish more, because it's easier to communicate and set things up virtually," said van Gaalen.

"It's really easy to reach people from other schools," added Abdelrahman.

Both had been busy, working to help create material for the club to share throughout Black History Month, and took a moment to reflect on what the month means to them. For van Gaalen, the month is about celebrating the accomplishments of the Black community and their contribution to Canada's history.

“The biggest thing for me is that it’s a very empowering month and a reminder of Black excellence, of Black resilience, of all the things that the Black community has accomplished,” said van Gaalen. “It’s really important that it’s a celebration of Black people and a portrayal of Black people in a positive light. So often, in the media, there is a negative portrayal of the Black community.”

Abdelrahman echoed this sentiment, as she sees Black History Month as a learning opportunity – a chance for people to better educate themselves about past events, both the good and the bad.

“For me, it’s an opportunity to not only recognize, but to cognize things,” said Abdelrahman. “It’s a time to appreciate the strides for change that we have made, but to also acknowledge that we’re still a long way from…the world that we want to create.”

For those who are wondering how they should be spending their time during Black History Month, Abdelrahman offered some suggestions. She sees education as the key to making meaningful progress and change. Pick a topic you’re interested in, and dig in.



“It’s a time to really learn. Racism is like a disease and the only cure for it is people who are willing to learn and willing to change,” said Abdelrahman.

It’s an opportunity to reflect, explained van Gaalen, and remember the sacrifice, dedication and accomplishments of those who came before us. It should also serve as a reminder of the work still to be done, and is an opportunity to commit yourself to meaningful action in the months ahead.

“We can become a part of history, right now,” said van Gaalen. “Your actions mean a lot.”

Teachers, too, need to take action and should incorporate Black history into their classes – during Black History Month and throughout the year, van Gaalen explained. There are connections for each subject area and a way to connect people, events and accomplishments from Black history to curriculum. It’s a necessary step for teachers to take, and a meaningful one even if it’s not perfect.

“It might not always be perfect,” said van Gaalen. “I think that trying is much better than just not saying anything at all.”

Both van Gaalen and Abdelrahman shared the impact the African Heritage Club’s staff mentors, Carol Pinnock and Chris Ashley, have had on them. This has included the chance to take on new responsibilities, and learn new skills beyond what they expected.

“They really push me outside of my comfort zone, and have given me so many new opportunities,” said van Gaalen. “I’m so glad that I joined.”

Having staff members that you can speak openly and honestly with, Abdelrahman explained, was what really stood out for her.

“It’s really cool, especially how understanding Mr. Ashley and Mrs. Pinnock are,” said Abdelrahman.

The best parts of Black History Month for these students involve opportunities to come together as a community, through events and conferences. Van Gaalen shared fond memories of the Beating the Odds conference, hosted by Laurier’s Association of Black Students (ABS).

“That was really empowering,” said van Gaalen. “To be surrounded by so many other Black students – it was very uplifting.”

Abdelrahman sees the best part of Black History Month as the opportunity for people of all backgrounds to come together to strive for change. It’s a chance to identify allies in other communities and focus on how to move forward in unison.

“It really is a time for all of us to come together…regardless of nationality, race, colour,” said Abdelrahman. “Change doesn’t happen just because Black people want it. It happens because all of us come together with a common goal.”

Reflecting on how we can take their favourite parts of Black History Month with us the rest of the year, van Gaalen believes that education is key. The conversation about Black history must continue all year if we are to make meaningful strides in our understanding of the lived experiences of all in our community, she explained.

“We should continue to talk about Black history, in general,” said van Gaalen. “The Black history that we talk about didn’t happen in February. You can talk about it any other month of the year.”

The power of community and collaboration is what Abdelrahman wants to see the eleven other months of year. She believes this is key to making the strides necessary to make our community a place where all are equals.

“Community is so strong,” said Abdelrahman. “When you have a group of people that really care about something, you can accomplish anything.”

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Supporting Staff and Supporting Our System

Supporting the wellness of staff, and by extension, the wellness of our students and community is a priority in any typical school year. With the added layer of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this focus is more important than ever before.

As part of the ever-evolving efforts to support staff wellness, the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) introduced a new employee and family assistance plan (EFAP) in September 2021. LifeWorks provides confidential short-term support for staff and their families 24/7, 365 days a year for when they need urgent assistance. LifeWorks also provides a library of articles, podcasts, tools and resources for when staff are looking to learn more about how to support their wellness.

The Communications, Employee Wellness and Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Departments continue to publish editions of Supporting Ourselves, Supporting One Another – a publication shared with all WRDSB staff that contains a selection of resources on a variety of topics including mental health and well-being.

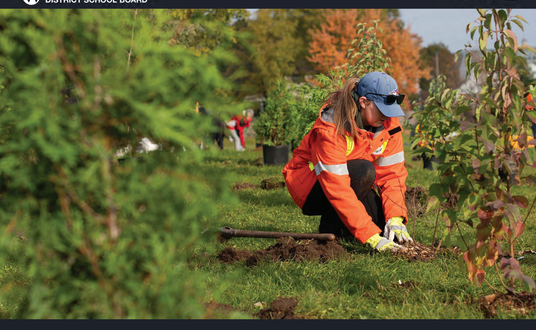
Supporting Ourselves, Supporting One Another also includes a section that provides resources to support staff learning on a number of topics, including Indigenous, equity and human rights focuses. This includes a selection of written, video and digital resources available to all staff to assist them in expanding their equity consciousness and understanding of their role in combating racism in our system and community.

Through a year where the ability to meet in-person has been limited, this offered a way to continue supporting staff learning and development with relevant, and current resources.

For staff who are looking to build on their knowledge at a self-directed pace, the LifeSpeak video library offers over 300 videos on a range of topics to help improve both physical and mental health. Accessible from anywhere, and at any time, these videos feature leading subject-matter experts to help guide WRDSB staff in supporting their wellness.

Together, these resources are part of the WRDSB's ongoing efforts to support every member of our team in their wellness as they support our students in theirs.

Waterloo Region District School Board 2020



Volunteers Dig In at Two Cambridge Schools for Microforesting Effort

On the brisk morning of Saturday, November 6, undeterred by the cold temperatures, volunteers came together to plant 170 trees at two Cambridge schools: Avenue Road Public School and Manchester Public School. Their work was part of a pilot program led by Sustainable Waterloo Region (SWR) that aims to plant microforests across the region. For these two sites, SWR partnered with the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), Energy+, EY Canada, the City of Cambridge, the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) and the Ages Foundation.

Allan Taylor, program development manager at SWR, was on hand helping to coordinate the planting efforts at Avenue Road PS. He was impressed by how quickly the volunteers got the trees into the ground.

"It's incredible," said Taylor. "We've been here a couple of hours…and we've planted 115 trees."



The microforesting efforts at the two schools will bring new life to these greenspaces, and enhance their ability to help fight climate change.

"Trees and microforests provide a number of benefits," said Taylor. "Trees through their lifetime will suck carbon out of the atmosphere, they provide habitat for insects and small animals and they help with runoff."

Beyond the welfare of the environment, these spaces will provide enhanced learning opportunities for students, and more teaching options for the staff at the schools. Taylor hopes that these spaces will provide the basis for building relationships with and understanding nature.



Kyra Chisholm, a program development coordinator with SWR, was organizing the efforts at Manchester PS, and explained that microforests, which could also be described as miniaturized ecosystems, enhance the ability of the individual trees to sequester carbon from the atmosphere. When trees are planted closer together they sequester more carbon and develop a stronger root system and tree canopy.

There are multiple upsides to adding microforests to these two schoolyards. Beyond the reduction in greenhouse gas, they offer a new space for outdoor learning and improve the shade cover in the schoolyards.

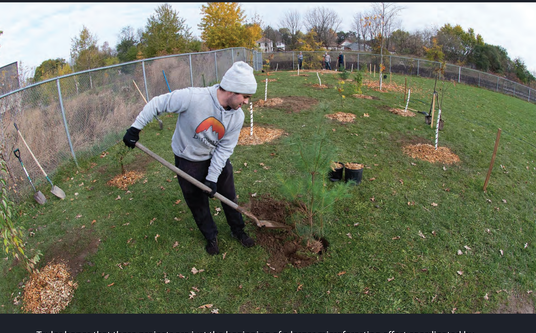
"There are so many co-benefits," said Chisholm. "There's just no downsides."



These reasons resonated with those who came out to volunteer, including Aiden, a student at Glenview Park Secondary School (GPSS) in Cambridge. For Aiden, it's a more meaningful way of collecting volunteer hours, and gives him an opportunity to confront the issue of climate change.

Alexia Kuan and Joe Stuart, volunteers at Manchester PS from EY Canada, echoed these same motivations. Kuan, co-chair of the sustainability committee at the EY office in Waterloo, explained that this initiative fits the three pillars of their goals. Their efforts will help to address climate change, while simultaneously strengthening the ecosystem and improving the greenspaces at the schools.

"There are so many positives," said Kuan. "All of those things align with what we're trying to do."



Taylor hopes that these projects are just the beginning of a larger microforesting effort coordinated by SWR across Waterloo Region. They're continuing to explore funding options and opportunities to make this a reality, but he is nothing but optimistic for the path ahead.

"This is the kind of thing that we do," said Taylor. "We'd love to see more happening in the future. I'm excited to see what it becomes."



WRDSB Staff, Students and Community Members Recognized for Black Brilliance Work by Kitchener

On Sunday, March 21, Laura Mae Lindo, MPP for Kitchener Centre, invited members of the community to come together virtually to mark the International Day for Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Lindo also had a surprise in store – the inaugural Black Excellence in Leadership Academy (BELA) awards, given to a group of local organizations, and one individual: Deepa Ahluwalia, Human Rights and Equity Advisor at the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB).

"I am so pleased to call Deepa my friend, and my colleague in this work," Lindo said of Ahluwalia. "My sister in the mission."

Lindo wanted to recognize Ahluwalia, especially, in hopes of highlighting the important role played by individuals who make a sustained effort to keep attention on the important work of addressing systemic racism.

"It takes these leaders in the system to be able to do this work," said Lindo while presenting the award. "That is what you're doing Deepa, each and every day."

Ahluwalia was grateful to be recognized, but also quick to share the recognition with her colleagues in the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Department, and the students, staff and community members who have been intimately involved in the Black Brilliance work of the WRDSB.

"This award isn't just for me," said Ahluwalia. "There are so many people in our system that are doing really incredible work to support African, Caribbean and Black students,"

For Ahluwalia, one of the most meaningful outcomes has been the relationships, connections and networks that have been built as a result of this work. Several students who were involved in attending and supporting the Black Brilliance work as students, stayed in touch when they made the transition to community member, as they remain invested in making the WRDSB a better system for all.

"A big part of why this work has been so enriching is because I have been able to meet with some amazing students," said Ahluwalia. "That's been really, really powerful."

Not only was Ahluwalia recognized individually, the Black Brilliance work the WRDSB has been engaged in since 2017 was also recognized. This group includes both former and current students and staff, in addition to community members and groups like the Black Brilliance Advisory Council. Some examples of the group's work include the annual Black Brilliance Conference, the Speaker Series, and other ongoing strategies for the achievement and well-being of African, Caribbean and Black students.

"To all of the Black Brilliance team, I just wanted to say thank you," said Lindo. "For the amazing work that you're doing, for creating that space."

The impact of the Black Brilliance team can be seen looking at the number of Black Student Unions (BSU), Black Student Association (BSA) and African Heritage Clubs that now exist in schools throughout the WRDSB. Individually, these groups ensure that students have a space where all can feel welcome, and feel their lived experiences are heard and appreciated. Together, they help to build a sense of community for students throughout the WRDSB.

Bethelyn, a student at Bluevale Collegiate Institute (BCI), shared her experience with the BSA at her school, and the Black Brilliance Conferences.

"Those conferences…introduced me to so many other Black students in the WRDSB," said Bethelyn. She was especially struck by the supportive nature of the events, and how far the Black student community reaches outside of BCI.

Christoper Ashley, is a history teacher at Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational School (KCI), and one of the staff sponsors of the African Heritage Club, along with his colleague, Carol Pinnock. He spoke at the event about how he sees his role to be one of teaching from an anti-racist perspective, to provide students with the skills to actively be anti-racists themselves.

"We're all the same, our cosmetic differences are only that. I can accept blood and organ transfusion and transplants from anyone and go on living and thriving. So, if racism is taught, then anti-racism education can also be taught. Our efforts to create a better world for this and our next generation are required," said Ashley.

While she's happy the efforts of all those who support the WRDSB Black Brilliance program are being recognized, Ahluwalia knows the journey is far from over, and there is plenty of work still yet to be done. The road ahead is full of possibilities to make change, and she explained the path to a better system for all relies on the meaningful involvement of students and community members. That is when there is a possibility for transformation.

"Side by side, working together – that's when the magic happens."