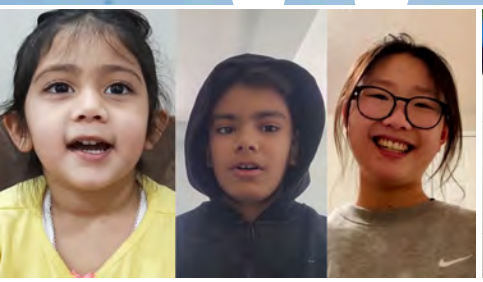
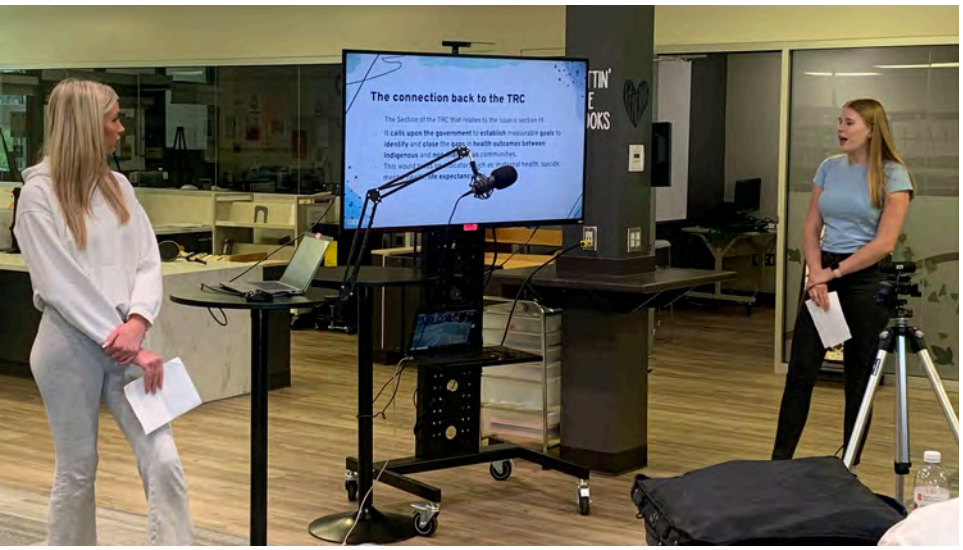
WE ARE WRDSB




Be a
RAINBOW
In
someone
else's
CLOUD




The connection back to the TRC





As we embark upon 2023, it feels like the perfect time to reflect on all that we accomplished, all that we navigated and all that we learned in 2022. Though we continued to face interruptions from the pandemic, we witnessed students, staff, parents, caregivers, families and community partners coming together to support all students in achieving their fullest potential.

- jeewan chanicka

Director's Message

It has been a landmark year at the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) and also across our vibrant, diverse, and resilient community.

- Joanne Weston

Chairperson Message





As we find ourselves nearly a month into 2023, we believe that it is essential to take a moment and reflect on all that we learned, all the challenges we overcame, and all the growth we experienced in 2022.

Vaishnave Raina and Kenzy Soror

Letter from Student Trustees

Public Education in 2022

Opportunities and Challenges

We are at a moment in time where we have an opportunity to build a public education system that truly serves every student, and sets all students up for success in learning and in life. It's the opportunity to create schools where identity and social location are no longer factors that determine outcomes for students. The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) has set this as a goal, with the knowledge that this work will not be easy, but that it is necessary. This commitment is one that allows us to ensure public education serves all students, families and communities. It is a huge trust and one that we take very seriously.

Read more

Student Voice



In 2022, the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) student census allowed us to hear the voices of more than 30,000 of the students we serve as we plan how to better support them. This census included innovative and differentiated methods for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 to share their thoughts, experiences and ideas to help shape their own learning experiences.

Strategic Plan

2022 was a year of accomplishments celebrated and of challenges navigated. Top amongst our accomplishments is our new Strategic Plan. It was built with the voices of those we serve: students, staff, families and the community members of Waterloo Region. This plan will guide us towards the creation of an education system that prepares students for success as we move towards the 22nd century. Through this plan, we will create schools that offer educational experiences and opportunities for all students that shape who they become as human beings and contributing members within their communities and society. We are so proud of all that we achieved in 2022 towards both the creation of and in support of our Strategic Plan.

Our Vision

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

Our Mission

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

Strategic Directions

As we look towards the future, we are setting our goals high. We aim to set the WRDSB apart as a leader in public education not only in Canada, but around the world.

Our six Strategic Directions will guide us on this journey



Centering students



Support for student and staff well-being



Equitable opportunities and outcomes



Strengthen connections through family and community engagement



Increase student learning through engagement



Collaboration and compassion for transformation

Learner Profile

The learner profile is made up of the skills and attributes students need to be successful in learning and in life as we move toward the 22nd century. The Learner Profile is designed to ensure students have the ability to succeed academically in the classroom, and have the skills to excel in their future careers, whatever their chosen pathway. It was developed in direct consultation with students, to ensure it responds to their needs.

When they graduate, WRDSB students will be:



Confident



Inclusive



Attentive to relationships



Community-oriented



Empathetic



Creative and Curious



Change Makers

Waterloo Region District School Board
51 Ardelt Avenue
Kitchener, ON
N2C 2R5

Find us on social media

A Message from Director of Education jeewan chanicka

As we embark upon 2023, it feels like the perfect time to reflect on all that we accomplished, all that we navigated and all that we learned in 2022. While previously titled, The Director's Report, moving forward, this report will be called the WRDSB Annual Report.



It is a reflection of the shift in our organization and of the significant teamwork required to accomplish our goals. There are many faces on the frontlines and behind the scenes who work diligently each day on behalf of all the students we serve.

Though we continued to face interruptions from the pandemic, we witnessed students, staff, parents, caregivers, families and community partners coming together to support all students in achieving their fullest potential.

To guide the entire system in this work, in 2022 we launched our new Strategic Plan - a roadmap built with the voices of those we serve. Through the strategic planning process we heard from over 10,000 people, making this by far, the most broad consultation the WRDSB has ever engaged in. Participants included families, community members, partner organizations, and most importantly, students from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

We are committed to developing an education district that centres student voice and making students active partners in their educational journey. This begins by prioritizing their voices. We saw just how eager they were to take the reins and articulate what they need and want through their school experiences. More than half of those taking part in the strategic planning process were K-12 students. More than 5,000 of the students we serve told us about what they need to support their success and well-being.

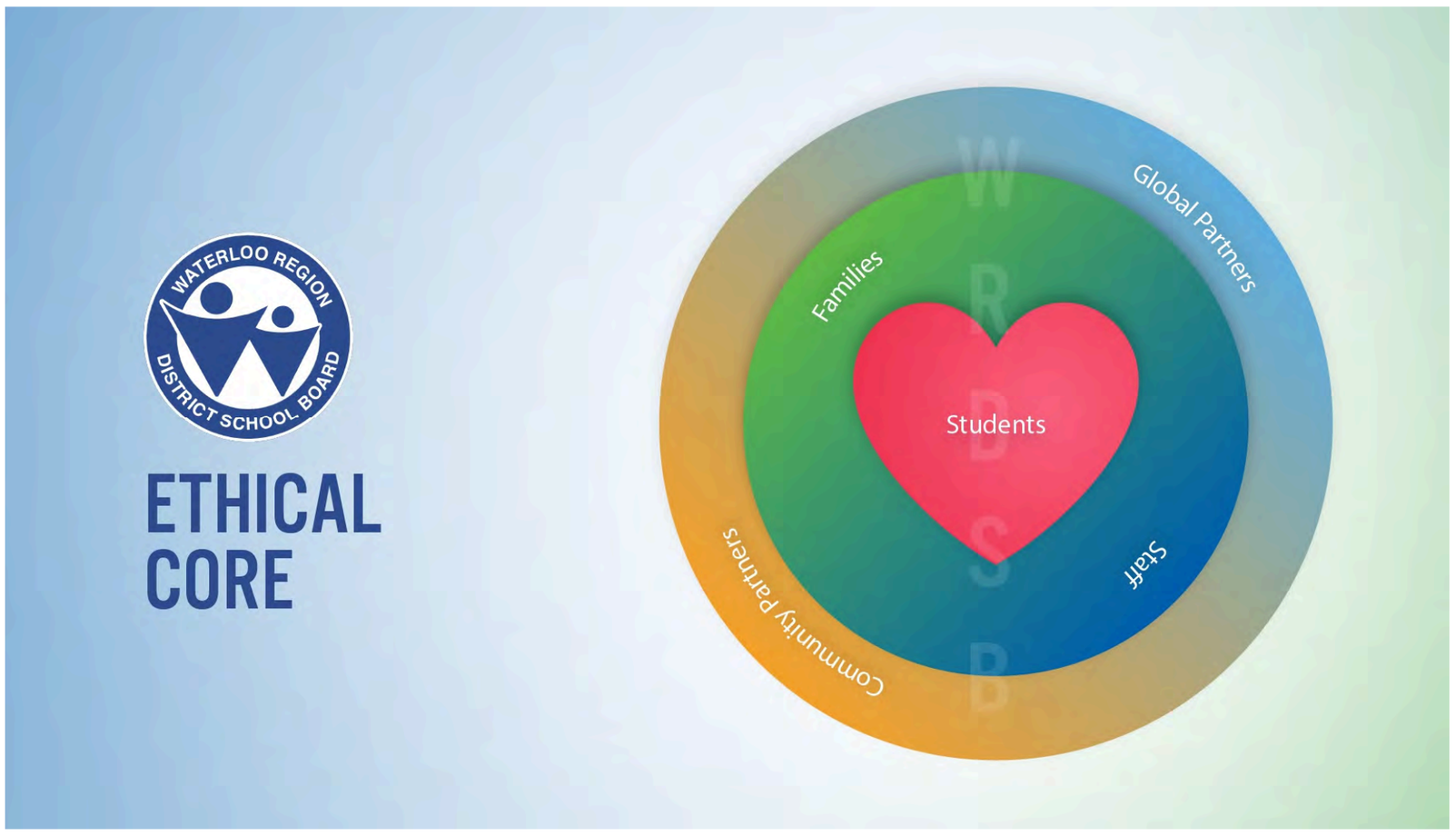
The consultation process included innovative approaches to help ensure every student had the chance to offer meaningful feedback about their experiences at school, and what they want to take away from their time in the WRDSB.



Our Strategic Plan development was guided by the Board of Trustees at every stage in the process. Each of our Trustees offered careful guidance and input to help ensure that the voices of their constituents were heard as we put together a new plan to serve them better than ever before.

The resulting Strategic Plan is one that will guide us towards the creation of an educational system that prepares students for success as we move towards the 22nd century. From our new vision and mission, to the seven attributes of the Learner Profile and our six Strategic Directions, this plan will help us build a school system that better supports the needs of ALL the students we serve. One that provides excellent educational experiences and opportunities for all students, that helps them achieve to their highest potential and shape who they become as human beings and contributing members within their communities, society and world.

This new plan has led us to articulate a new Ethical Core that is being used to guide our decisions as an organization and a reconceptualization of our organizational chart to better serve the needs of students and families.





Our Strategic Plan recognizes that the global context into which students are venturing and many of the jobs that students will hold when they graduate do not yet exist and they will be required to solve problems we can't currently conceive. The educational foundation we build for them needs to offer a broad array of knowledge and skills, to equip them to be successful wherever life and work take them. This means a continued and increased focus on mathematics, literacy, and supporting the development of students' capacity for compassion, creativity, curiosity and social responsibility. Together, these skills will allow students to imagine, innovate and create a better world.

As a part of our commitment to a public education system that serves all students, we have encountered significant challenges with ongoing racist and hateful campaigns of misinformation. This report addresses this in more detail under Opportunities and Challenges.

This hateful onslaught has been tough on staff and families across our system, but its impact is most concerning for the children we serve. Our most recent student census showed us that a third of students who responded identified as racialized, and 24% of those in Grades 7 to 12 self-identified with at least one 2SLGBTQIA+ sexual orientation. We know that many of these students are overrepresented in achievement gaps - our work to support them is about maintaining excellence for all students, while supporting those who are most marginalized.

As I said to the Globe and Mail, making sure that all kids can be successful is not a woke agenda. It's us, as a public school district, caring about all kids. We remain more committed than ever to taking a caring approach to preparing all students for success on their chosen pathways after their time in the WRDSB.



Through all of this, 2022 represented another year of offering WRDSB students the excellence in education that has come to be expected from our school board in the community we serve. Students from Kindergarten through Grade 12 had extraordinary learning opportunities and experiences that helped them to gain skills and knowledge that they otherwise might not have.

Whether it was students in our secondary schools taking part in co-operative education placements, gaining valuable experience for their post-secondary pathway, or elementary students venturing out to the White Owl Native Ancestry Association (WONAA) maple syrup sugarbush to learn about everything from original techniques to modern production

methods. These experiential learning opportunities are due in great part to the close partnerships we foster with community organizations and businesses - we are all invested in seeing the students in Waterloo Region reach their full potential.

The culture of innovation in Waterloo Region, and in the WRDSB, continues to shine bright. Thanks to a partnership with Smart Waterloo Region, secondary students at five schools are becoming better prepared for the world that they will graduate into. Together, we are supporting a ground-up approach for WRDSB educators in learning how to use the Global Innovation Management Institute's (GIMI) Impact Program in their classrooms, to inspire students to take a design thinking approach to solving real-world problems in their communities.



Innovation isn't confined to the classroom, by any means. In April 2022, the Region of Waterloo awarded the WRDSB with a Water Efficiency Excellence Award as part of their Water Efficient Technology (WET) program. We as an organization think about how we become better stewards of the environment, we had to consider how to better take care of the water. This award recognized our work in upgrading 16 schools to reduce water consumption, and the installation of high-tech water meters to provide 24/7 data in case of water leaks. These investments are saving 18,000 litres of water every day - that's roughly the same amount of water used by 41 households of three people.

In the meantime, we continue to work towards becoming a system where our schools become the heart of the communities. In modelling this, we are happy that our relationship with our neighbours at our Education Centre, A Better Tent City, continues to flourish. It is a reminder for us that when our most vulnerable community members are looked after, the communities in which our children are growing up are safer for us all. We hope this model will continue to inspire others across Waterloo Region and beyond to work in this way. We have had visits from officials in other parts of the province and across the country to learn from this example of compassionate partnership. We are better and stronger when we are together.

This approach to community and municipal partnership continued to grow in 2022 with the creation of new roundtables where we are seeking to share priorities, align services and better work together across the region.



As we look to the road ahead, we remain laser focused on Student Achievement and Wellbeing. We believe that the pathways we are forging will establish the WRDSB as a sector leader in public education. Our Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP) helps us take our Strategic Plan from ideas to action. Along with continuing to prioritize and support student achievement, we

also aim to increase support for sovereignty, equity and human rights. The WRDSB will become a human-rights based organization to ensure that every student and staff member have equitable opportunities in an environment free from discrimination.

We've begun to lay the groundwork to support every member of the WRDSB in playing an active role in our work of ensuring every student has the opportunity to reach their full potential. In late 2022, we launched the WRDSB Sovereignty Affirming and Equity Competencies, designed to complement the Ontario Leadership Framework. This living guide will continue to evolve as we learn and grow as an educational institution and recognizes that these competencies are not optional as we seek to be responsive to students, staff and communities.

Food security is increasingly becoming an important issue for families in Waterloo Region. We know that a student who is fed, is one who is able to achieve their fullest potential in the classroom. In early 2022, the Waterloo Education Foundation Inc. (WEFI) donated $21,000 to our partners in student nutrition at Nutrition for Learning, Food4Kids Waterloo Region and the MayCourt Club of Kitchener-Waterloo. I look forward to continuing our work with our partners to help ensure that no student is distracted by or suffers from a lack of access to food.

In 2023, I know we will only continue to build on the foundation of success that we built in 2022. The education and support of students is not something we undertake alone, though, as every parent, caregiver, family or community member and more are our partners in helping to prepare the students we serve for success in learning and life.

I look forward to another year of growth, innovation, creativity, learning and love in the WRDSB.



jeewan chanicka
Director of Education

Waterloo Region District School Board
51 Ardelt Avenue
Kitchener, ON
N2C 2R5

Find us on social media

A Message from the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees

It has been a landmark year at the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) and also across our vibrant, diverse, and resilient community.

As we continue to rebound from the impact and address of the COVID-19 pandemic, we remain focused and steadfast on our goals as a system and ensuring all students across the district receive quality public education in spaces where they are included and experience success and belonging.

As Chairperson, it has been my pleasure to lead such a dynamic group of Trustees and Student Trustees who are truly committed to digging in and helping students reach their full potential. This year was special, as we were able to engage in the largest consultation process we have ever done towards building a plan that will guide us for the next five years. The consultation process included students, staff, families, and community members and allowed us to explicitly define a shared vision, mission and six strategic directions as part of our new Strategic Plan. This process allowed us to hear directly from all those we serve about what matters most as we move forward.

We are committed to keeping you informed about our progress and measuring our success. We will issue an annual Report Card on our progress with the Strategic Plan. Additionally, each school year we will share the details of our progress through our Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP) which highlights four key areas; Achievement, Human Rights and Equity, Mental Health, Well-being and Engagement, and Transitions and Pathways. Our hope is that increased transparency will continue to strengthen your confidence in the work we are doing to support all students who attend WRDSB schools.

This year was full of opportunity and accomplishment. Apart from the significant work of the Strategic Plan process, we were able to hold a policy review process, welcome and onboard new Trustees following the municipal election, plan our budget, rename Laurel Heights Secondary School, open Oak Creek Public School, support the ongoing efforts of student nutrition organizations through a donation from the Waterloo Education Foundation Inc. (WEFI), and support the Student Trustees'

vision of a reimagined Student Trustee Election. Of course, we also continued our vital role as ardent advocates for the constituents we serve on both local and provincial issues, from the funding available to school boards, to advocacy for the introduction of an Indigenous history curriculum for students across the province. We have also enjoyed returning to long awaited in-person meetings and events where we have been able to connect, discuss, and build a better future for WRDSB students.

This year saw us overcoming substantial challenges as we navigated the pandemic and dealt with the realities and risks of racism, hate and a cyber incident.

All of this has reinforced our commitment to the students, families and staff we serve.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to acknowledge Director chanicka, along with Senior Staff, and all WRDSB employees for the continued development and delivery on our key priorities that support student achievement and well-being. Thank you for keeping students at the centre of your work and promoting our collective success.



Joanne Weston
Chairperson of the Board of Trustees

Waterloo Region District School Board
51 Ardelt Avenue
Kitchener, ON
N2C 2R5

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A Message from Student Trustees Raina and Soror

As we find ourselves nearly a month into 2023 already, it's important that we take a moment to reflect on all that we learned, all the challenges we overcame and all of the growth we experienced in 2022.

As we find ourselves nearly a month into 2023, we believe that it is essential to take a moment and reflect on all that we learned, all the challenges we overcame, and all the growth we experienced in 2022. This school year marks our return to the pre-pandemic learning model. While we have not entirely recovered from the effect of the pandemic, we did see many reminders of life before COVID-19 return. From in-person graduation and commencement ceremonies, to our favorite clubs, teams and sports - there was a lot to be thankful for in 2022.

In our roles as Student Trustees, we are committed to advocating for all students of the Waterloo Region on the Board of Trustees. To ensure that every student has an opportunity to have their voice heard in the selection of the Student Trustees who represent them, we worked to reform the Student Trustee Election process. We are so proud that, for the first time, every secondary student of WRDSB will be directly voting for their representative.

The sixteen WRDSB secondary schools have been split into two geographical ridings, where one Student Trustee seat will be filled from each riding. Unlike prior years, there will be no limitations on the number of candidates able to campaign. By carrying out this Board-wide election, every WRDSB secondary student will now have the chance to help shape decisions made by the Board of Trustees.

For the second year in a row, the Student Roundtable continues to prove its efficiency in gathering direct feedback from the student body. 2022 saw us continuing to bring together students in Grades 7 to 12 for conversations about issues that are important to them – ranging from mental health to youth political engagement – and gathering their input on items up for discussion at the Board Table. We want to express our sincere gratitude for everyone who takes part in these meetings

including guest speakers, staff, Trustees, and most of all, the student attendees. We continue to thank the Board for their support in helping us run the Student Roundtable safely and successfully.

Another key aspect of our commitment to amplify student voice at the Board Table is participating in WRDSB committees. Alongside other dedicated students, staff, and community members, we are honored to have been part of the School Naming Review Committee, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Group, French Immersion Review Committee, Policy Working Group, and Environmental Sustainability Committee.

Looking ahead to 2023, we continue to act as dedicated advocates for all WRDSB students at the Board Table and beyond. Every student the WRDSB serves should have a voice in shaping the future of learning that supports their success. While there still continues to be room for improvement, what brings a smile to our faces as we reflect on the year past is that each year we are in a better position than the one before when it comes to student representation.

It is vital that the WRDSB continues to dedicate resources to those struggling with the ever-lasting effects of the pandemic, and that closing the learning gap remains front and centre on the Board's table. Furthermore, we urge the Board to continue their efforts to increase equity, inclusion, and accessibility in WRDSB schools.

We encourage WRDSB students to reach out to us through email, Instagram, or use #allearskw on any social media platform to provide feedback, ask questions, or seek support.

On behalf of ourselves, past, and future Student Trustees, we thank everyone who has been helping us on our quest to ensure that students come first – each and every one. WRDSB students, it was, is, and always will be a pleasure to serve you!

Vaishnave Raina and Kenzy Soror
2022-23 Student Trustees

Waterloo Region District School Board
51 Ardelt Avenue
Kitchener, ON
N2C 2R5

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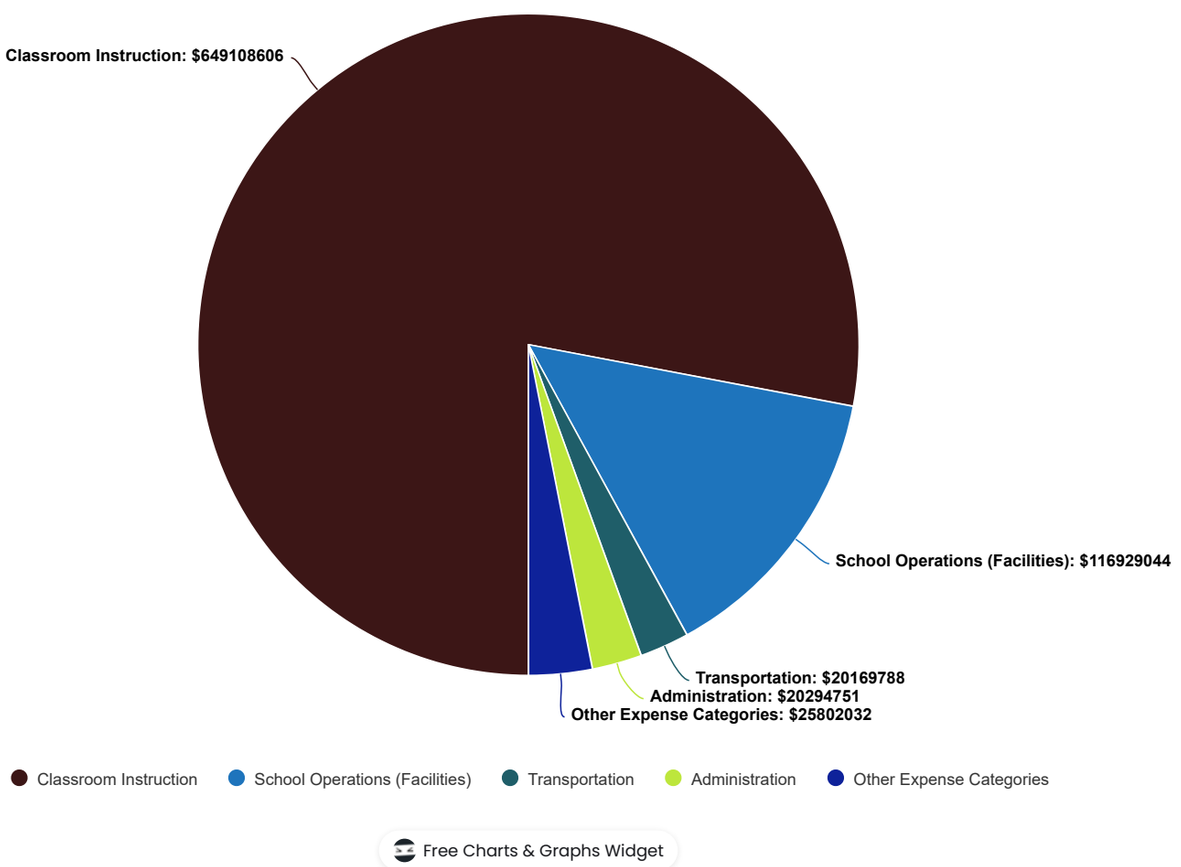
By the Numbers

On Wednesday, June 15, 2022, Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) trustees approved a budget comprising $841M in expenditures, with a capital budget of $75.3M for the 2022-23 school year.

The development of the Waterloo Region District School Board's (board's) operating budget includes many underlying assumptions which, over the course of a school year, can change. The process used in the development of the annual operating budget for the board has evolved over the years but the underlying factors that influence its development continue to be:

- Ministry funding and directives;
- The board's underlying financial position (accumulated surplus/ deficit); and,
- The board's strategic plan

The approved budget for 2022-23 complies with provincial legislation, ensures the long-term fiscal stability of the board, and will support the achievement of the goals outlined in our new strategic plan.



Enrollment in WRDSB



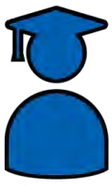
64,882

Total Students



44,719

Elementary Students



20,163

Secondary Students



106

Elementary Schools



17

Secondary Schools



90%

% of Primary Classes at 20 or less



17,979

First Language is NOT the language of instruction*



879

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



3,763

Extended Day Enrolment

Find us on social media

Waterloo Region District School Board
51 Ardelt Avenue
Kitchener, ON
N2C 2R5

Board of Trustees

The Waterloo Region District School Board's (WRDSB) eleven-person elected board of trustees is responsible for approving the policies and bylaws governing the Board's operations. The board of trustees also ensures that the quality of education in Waterloo Region is maintained, and the educational goals and needs of all students are met.



Joanne Weston

Role: Chairperson
Municipality: Kitchener
Contact Chairperson Weston

It is my privilege and honour to serve as the Chairperson 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.



Kathleen Woodcock

Role: Vice-Chair
Municipality: Waterloo/Wilmot
Contact Vice-Chair Woodcock

I am honoured to be elected for a sixth 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 Director's performance review. I have served as WRDSB chair, vice-chair and past chair. I am currently serving a two-year term as First Vice-President of the Ontario Public School Boards Association.

As an advocate for public education, I put students first to ensure that schools provide a safe, inclusive learning environment so all students achieve success. As the WRDSB continues to implement the strategic plan, I engage 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 (Retired), 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.



Bill Cody

Municipality: Cambridge/North Dumfries
Contact Trustee Cody

It is a privilege and honour to be elected as School Trustee for Cambridge and North Dumfries. Offering my time and skills to help ensure our children receive the best education possible is the best investment I can make in my community. Cambridge is where I was born and raised, where I went to school, and where our children went to school. Professionally and over the course of a few decades, I have worked in various aspects of the transportation industry and volunteered within our community.

A good education is essential, contributing to personal success and mental well-being. As an alternative to college and university, trades offer students well-paying, meaningful careers and I will support and promote opportunities in our schools that bring back skilled trades as a solid career path. In schools and within our communities, I will prioritize safety for all students to ensure that we have a safe learning environment. Our ability to communicate is critical to keeping us connected, understanding one another, and respecting differences among us.

Our youth are our future leaders and their success depends on what is taught, and as your trustee, I will focus on our most important asset – our children's education. I hope to bring another perspective to the board and will serve with understanding, integrity and hard work.



Carla Johnson

Municipality: Cambridge/North Dumfries
Contact Trustee Johnson

It is truly an honour to serve Cambridge & North Dumfries as a Trustee. The WRDSB was my employer for my career as a middle school teacher. I have seen firsthand how vital our public education system is to our whole community. I look forward to championing all the creative and genius things happening in our schools. In spite of the many challenges these last few years, teachers and education workers continue to bring compassion and creativity to their classrooms every day. Our schools embrace every student that walks through our doors and nurtures the intelligence and growth of each individual. I will listen closely to our community and advocate for the needs and concerns. Together, we have the crucial job of preparing our students to be astute leaders for the future and I am very proud to be a partner in this great work.



Fred Meissner

Municipality: Woolwich/Wellesley
Contact Trustee Meissner

I am a lifelong resident of Waterloo region and have lived in the municipality of Woolwich/Wellesley for the past seventeen years. My spouse Terry and I are the proud parents of two (now grown) children who have expanded our family with the inclusion of their wonderful partners and five marvelous grandchildren.

I have retired from a fulfilling career as an educator for WRDSB in the local secondary school where I worked in both the English and Special Education departments, and while I am no longer in the classroom, I still find myself intensely interested in the ever-changing developments related to creating an effective education system. Three areas that I would like to see prioritized are:

1. Inclusive, accessible, safe classrooms, schools, and communities for all students.
2. Connecting and collaborating with parents, guardians, and the spectrum of individuals and community groups who have a vested interest in developing an effective educational experience for all students.
3. Affirming staff and related educational workers, recognizing their expertise in the classroom and their generous contributions to extra curricular activities.

When I'm not fulfilling my duties as trustee for Woolwich/Wellesley, you can find me reading, writing, or riding my bicycle on the scenic gravel roads throughout this region.



Scott Piatkowski

Municipality: Waterloo/Wilmot

Contact Trustee Piatkowski

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 October 2022, I was re-elected to a second term. My tenure as a Trustee has included serving as Vice-Chair for 2020/2021 and Chairperson of the Board for 2021/2022.

I currently serve on the following committees:

- Agenda Development
- Director's Performance Appraisal
- Audit
- Past Director's Bursary
- Trustee Self-Evaluation
- Discipline

Previously, I have served on the Policy Working Group, School Resource Officer Review Ad Hoc Committee, the Suspension Review Ad Hoc Committee (as Co-Chair), the Trustee Code of Conduct Review Committee, the French Immersion Review Committee, and the Waterloo Education Foundation Inc. Board of Directors. I also sit as the WRDSB's representative on the Board of Directors of 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.



Maedith Radlein

Municipality: Kitchener

Contact Trustee Radlein

I'm looking forward to representing the interests of parents, staff and students as a trustee. I worked as a teacher and principal with the WRDSB. My two children graduated from Bluevale C.I. where I served on the School Council. On retirement I continued my involvement in education as a Field Supervisor in the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier.

Waterloo Region has been my home since immigrating from Jamaica in 1987. Over the years I have been continuously involved in the community, volunteering with many organizations including Waterloo Minor Soccer, K-W YWCA, the Child Witness Centre and Mennonite Central Committee as well as the Region and cities of Waterloo & Kitchener. My commitment to all students is to create a positive learning environment; to value you for who you are; to nurture your uniqueness and work to ensure that you achieve successful outcomes. My commitment to parents is to listen and work to give your child the resources and conditions to optimize learning. My commitment to school staff is to value your contributions and hard work while working to build/support partnerships that give you the support you need.

I will work with staff and parents to facilitate respectful and open communication. Each school is its own community and the best support for its students lies in that relationship.



Mike Ramsay

Municipality: Kitchener
Contact Trustee Ramsay

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.



Marie Snyder

Municipality: Waterloo/Wilmot
Contact Trustee Snyder

I am so honoured to have been elected to represent Waterloo/Wilmot as a School Board Trustee. I am a retired high school teacher who had the pleasure of working at KCI for over 30 years. A lifelong resident of this region, I attended Winston Churchill, MacGregor, WCI, and KCI, and I watched my three children excel in our system as well. My educational background is in philosophy, psychology, religious studies, and visual arts, and I'm once again a student at Laurier because I love learning!

As a teacher, on top of lesson development, presentation, and assessment, I organized board-wide conferences on gender equity and on race relations, ran a film festival for student films across public and separate boards, and focused on several environmental efforts like the OneEarth club, Envirothon and EcoSchools competitions, and a yearly Earthfest music festival. I want to continue helping students to have a positive educational experience in our schools.

I look forward to working with parents, students, educational staff, and the community to advocate for issues of concern as we manage so many changes in our world together.



Meena Waseem

Municipality: Kitchener
Contact Trustee Waseem

I'm so excited to be working with families, staff, students, and the larger community to continue ensuring WRDSB schools are places where all our students thrive! My family and I immigrated to Waterloo Region in 2009 from Pakistan and I've grown up in our region's schools since. I'm a graduate of A. R. Kaufman, Forest Hill Elementary, Queensmount, and Cameron Heights.

I've worked with local and national organizations to address gaps in learning and resource access needs. I've also served on the board of a newspaper and a sexual violence support centre prior to joining the WRDSB. I have worked on mental health awareness and leadership skill-building in youth for almost a decade. My goal as a trustee is to show up authentically at the board table, provide transparency, and build bridges of understanding within our WRDSB community.

I'm currently a university student and was able to attend post-secondary school thanks to the support of this community. I'm committed to supporting you as you navigate the WRDSB, so please don't hesitate to reach out!



Cindy Watson

Municipality: Cambridge/North Dumfries

Contact Trustee Watson

Each and every student is valued, belongs and their academic achievement and well-being should be our primary focus according to the Education Act. Success is demonstrated by students who achieve their full potential, students with disabilities are given the best support, parents are treated as valued partners, staff has been given adequate resources and feels supported and all voices are valued and included in the decision-making process.

Students need strong literacy and numeracy skills; mental health supports and gaps in education need to be addressed. Students with disabilities need early intervention and resources that help them succeed.

All student, parent/guardian, staff and community members deserve to be included in the decision-making process with two-way communication that is open, transparent and accountable. I believe boards make better policy when students, parents/guardians, staff and community voices are valued and included.

Boards that embrace diversity of opinion and a culture of freedom generate new and creative ideas and solutions. Freedom that allows the sharing of different ideas and opinions in a respectful manner create a culture that acknowledges and understands that “everyone” plays a part and no contribution is insignificant.

Opportunities and Challenges for the WRDSB

We are at a moment in time where we have an opportunity to build a public education system that truly serves every student, and sets all students up for success in learning and in life.

We are at a moment in time where we have an opportunity to build a public education system that truly serves every student, and sets all students up for success in learning and in life. It's the opportunity to create schools where identity and social location are no longer factors that determine outcomes for students. The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) has set this as a goal, with the knowledge that this work will not be easy, but that it is necessary. This commitment is one that allows us to ensure public education serves all students, families and communities. It is a huge trust and one that we take very seriously.

This year has not been without significant challenges we have had to navigate. An October 2022 article in the *Globe and Mail* provided a snapshot of some of these challenges as a result of our work to prioritize the success of each and every student. WRDSB staff, Trustees and students faced hateful rhetoric, threats, acts of racism and persistent anti-2SLGBTQIA+ discourse. This came at us through all channels - direct messages, comments, emails and more.

We know these kinds of conversations and messages in public forums are harmful to the students and families we serve. The WRDSB Student Census, in which we heard from over 30,000 of the students we serve, gave us a more well-rounded understanding of who WRDSB students are. This includes approximately 3% of students who identified as Indigenous spanning 60 Nations, 10% identified as Black, one third of respondents identified as racialized, 15% as Muslim, 0.5% as Jewish, 13% reported annual household incomes of less than $40,000, 7.3% identified as having a disability or health condition, and 24% of those in Grades 7 to 12 self-identified with at least one 2SLGBTQIA+ sexual orientation. The hateful rhetoric and targeting that we face only further marginalizes students we know are already overrepresented in achievement and well-being gaps.

Despite this, we are committed to continuing our work to improve outcomes for all students. The opportunity ahead of us is one that will allow us to create a world class education system. We will maintain a focus on academic excellence for all students. We understand that our continued focus on the academic success and well-being of each and every student may continue to make the WRDSB a target for the kind of threats, racism and hate experienced in 2022. However, a larger and more considerable risk would be to not continue this work as it would mean the same students who have been historically, and are currently marginalized, would continue to encounter barriers and limitations in our schools.

There are those who would frame this important work as part of a "woke agenda", but we have seen tangible results, including an increase in graduation rates. It demonstrates how these efforts improve outcomes, experiences and learning for all students, especially those who we have not supported well in the past. This is the reward that comes with the risk of engaging in work we know will draw racist commentary and hate from those who would accuse us of being "woke".

We saw this with the return of the in-person Black Brilliance Conference in November 2022. Students shared how these opportunities throughout their time in secondary school have allowed them to build relationships with students who have similar shared experiences, from across the WRDSB. It's about ensuring that students feel welcome, supported and seen in their learning experiences.

We saw similar rewards for WRDSB students taking part in Smart Waterloo Region's Global Innovation Management Institute's (GIMI) Impact Program. Making use of their own initiative and lived experiences, they use design thinking to come up with solutions to real-world problems right in our community. Many of these projects focus on social justice issues, like providing gender-affirming clothing to students who identify as transgender, or how to improve the experiences of newcomer families to Waterloo Region. In the end, this provides students with the opportunity to build skills for the future, while they help make a positive difference for the world around them.

To be clear, by focusing on students who have been in the margins, we are creating a better public education system for ALL students - one where all students will be better off. We encourage people who may read or hear about what we are doing, to clarify with us directly on official WRDSB channels, as we know that some reporting is intended to inflame fear and create

panic. The goal is that all children see themselves reflected, experience belonging and success in school **because** of the way our system works - not in spite of it.

Understanding the richness of students' lived experiences and that of the families we serve better prepares children for life in a global village - one which they will experience first hand. As a district, we know we will not always get it right, but we are committed to working towards it with the support of students, staff, families and communities.

Ultimately, while difficult, we know that we must continue to work with the end goal of creating a public education system where every child - regardless of identity or social location - is able to achieve their fullest potential. Director of Education jeewan chanicka clarified this succinctly for the *Globe and Mail*:

“Making sure that all kids can be successful is not a woke agenda,” he said. “It’s us, as a public-school district, caring about all kids.”

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Operational Goals

The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) is committed to a culture of transparency and accountability. We recognize that achieving the directions set out in 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 mental health and well-being of WRDSB students and the staff who serve them. We will work collaboratively to improve our learning and working environments in the best interests of all students, staff and community members. We understand that critical to building trust and confidence in our work, is our ability to report and share our progress on outcomes. This is a commitment we will continue to uphold.

Mathematics

We know that mathematics is an essential skill, vital to WRDSB students' future success. Through a variety of tools and teaching approaches, educators encourage students as they develop a deep understanding of math. A range of the strategies we have identified to support this goal are already well underway.

As we emerge from a global pandemic, we are encouraged to see continued evidence that the WRDSB's focus on mathematics education has continued undeterred. 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.

Secondary students put their mathematics, engineering and problem solving skills into action as part of the Waterloo High School Electric Vehicle Challenge at the University of Waterloo in May of 2022. In the Elementary Remote Learning School,

students took part in Dell Technologies' Girls Who Game program to learn more about the opportunities available to them in science, technology, engineering and math. Neil Mitra, a former WRDSB student innovating the future of blood testing in response to cardiac events, reflected on how what he learned at Waterloo Collegiate Institute prepared him for success after graduation as he studies Engineering at the University of British Columbia.



Students Get Charged Up For Electric Vehicle Challenge



Gaming Brings Remote Learning Students Together



Democratizing Healthcare and Testing with Skills Learned in the WRDSB

Graduation Rates

We aim to support every student in reaching their fullest potential and reaching graduation. This support is being offered in many ways to meet a student's individual learning needs. In 2022, we were pleased to see data from the Ministry of Education showing that the number of WRDSB students who graduate in five years increased 2.2% to 85.9%, and the number of students who graduate in four years increased by 4.7% to 76.5%.

We also saw the welcome return of in-person commencement and graduation ceremonies, many of which were well-attended by proud parents, caregivers and extended families. Students at the Huron Heights Secondary School commencement ceremony in October 2022 reflected on how they were already seeing how what they learned at school was helping to give them a head start on their post-secondary pathways.

Students across the WRDSB are supported in preparing for whatever that pathway might be, from the workplace, to an apprenticeship, to college or university. At Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute (CHCI), students in welding class had the chance to learn from former CHCI students who are now pursuing careers in the manufacturing field at Conestoga College. They helped to demonstrate just how many options were available to support them in pursuing a career as a welder.

One such opportunity is a co-operative education placement. Secondary students across the WRDSB take part in co-op placements, both during the school year and over the summer, to gain practical workplace experience. Co-op placements help students gain a better understanding of their chosen post-secondary pathway and build relationships with future employers while they're still in high school.

Co-op isn't just for students who are interested in the trades - placements can take students to a whole range of fields and industries, from marketing in a real estate office, to the computer science department at the University of Waterloo (UW). Ethan Warren, a student at Elmira District Secondary School did just that for his co-op placement, taking an active role helping to improve user experiences at UW. Warren encourages anyone who is interested to explore the possibilities available with co-op.

"If you have any idea of what you want to do as a career, give it a shot," said Warren



More WRDSB Students Supported in Reaching Graduation and Beyond



Sparking a Passion for Welding at Cameron Heights



Opportunities Abound in Co-Operative Education



Gaining an Appreciation for Vastness of the Universe at Space Camp

Well-Being

We believe that a collaborative approach is needed to provide positive learning environments for every student we serve. We work together - with staff, families, parents and caregivers - as partners in every student's learning journey and we are committed to supporting the well-being of all involved.

Students are embraced with an attitude of care and support in the WRDSB, and in turn, they reflect these same values on their peers and community. We saw this at Groh Public School with the overwhelming response by students to the launch of a new Kindness Club. Nearly 200 students showed up for the first meeting, all eager to engage the whole school and the surrounding community in spreading kindness.

We know that when students thrive, experience joy and have their well-being supported, their ability to achieve academic success is increased. In April 2022, as one part of our efforts to support this for all students, Black students, staff and community members from across the WRDSB came together to highlight student voice and Black Brilliance at the Black Artist-in-Residence Showcase at Eastwood Collegiate Institute.

Students are also driven to help support well-being through education. Hana Adham was a Grade 12 student at Laurel Heights Secondary School, who saw an opportunity to help educate the educators about how they can make their classrooms spaces where every student feels seen, safe and supported. Hana led a virtual conference for teachers at her school and created an anti-racism suggestion sheet, with a goal to reach even more teachers looking to make changes to create a more inclusive classroom.



Students Eager to Spread Kindness at Groh Public School



Showcasing Black Brilliance



Finding Purpose in Eliminating Discrimination

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WRDSB Senior Team

In 2022, every member of the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) Senior Team continued to demonstrate their commitment to supporting all parts of our organization in our most important work: providing every student we serve with the opportunity to learn, grow and reach their fullest potential in our schools.

With this in mind, we made some changes to the Senior Team this past year to better orient ourselves for the goals laid out in our Strategic Plan. This included the shifting of the coordinating council to include the Director, two Associate Directors and an Executive Officer.



jeewan chanicka
Director of Education



Scott Miller
Associate Director, Learning Services



Graham Shantz
Associate Director, Business Services



Eusis Dougan-McKenzie
Executive Officer, Corporate Services and Strategic Initiatives



Ivanna MacIsaac
Executive Manager of Information Technology and Digital Transformation



Jodi Albrecht
Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



Ron Deboer
Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



Jay Fedosoff
Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



Evelyn Giannopoulos
Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



Crissa Hill
Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



Pam Kaur
Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



Della Lataille-Herdsman
Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



Bill Lemon

Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



John Veit

Controller, Facility Services



Nick Landry

Controller, Financial Services



Deepa Ahluwalia

Human Rights & Equity Advisor



Alana Russell

Chief Communications Officer



Dana Liebermann

Senior Manager, Research and Evidence-based Practice



Carol Dey

Senior Manager, Human Resources Services



Justin Brown

Senior Manager, Human Resource Services



Ron Dallan

Manager of Capital Projects

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Asian Affinity Group Marks Asian Heritage Month



In May 2022, members of the Waterloo Region District School Board's (WRDSB) Asian Affinity Group for employees came together to help all in our community learn more about what it means to be Asian for Asian Heritage Month.

What is Asian?

In the video, "What is Asian?", members of the Asian Affinity Group share what being Asian means to them. From the foods they love to enjoy with family and friends, to the strong bonds they feel to their families, watch the video to hear from WRDSB employees about celebrating and honouring their identities:

What is Asian?
WRDSB

Watch on

Affinity Groups

Affinity Groups offer spaces for WRDSB employees to come together with facilitators who have a shared lived experience. Affinity Groups were created as a direct response to data from the WRDSB Workforce Census which demonstrated a need for employee networks based on lived experience.

All WRDSB employees work to support the development and success of the students we serve, and we know that they model mental health and well-being for students. With this in mind, Affinity Groups aim to offer spaces that are healing, supportive and offer a voice for employees whose identities are marginalized.

We know that achievement in the classroom is directly supported by a student's well-being, a factor which is impacted by the well-being of the educator in front of them. Ultimately, Affinity Groups are just one more way in which the WRDSB supports the academic success of the students we serve.



Students Eager to Spread Kindness at Groh PS



Gaining an Appreciation for the Vastness of the Universe at Space Camp



Opportunities Abound in Co-Operative Education

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Black Brilliance Shines Bright at Annual Student Conference



The sounds of singing, music, laughter and joy echoed through the hallways of the Education Centre as Black students and staff from across the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) came together for Boldly Belonging: the Black Brilliance Student Conference in November 2022.

The event, first hosted in 2018, features a keynote address, focused breakout sessions and is permeated with the joyful celebration of being Black. It's just one example of the innovative approaches taken to ensure every student in the WRDSB is supported in reaching their full potential.



Antonio Michael Downing, WRDSB's Black Artist-in-Residence, opened the event with a keynote address, focused on a Black Brilliance Toolkit. Downing explained this toolkit, made up of values, skills and knowledge, includes:

- Self-Esteem
- Knowing Yourself, Your Story and Black History
- Excellence
- Cultivating a Sense of Joy, of Beauty and of Justice

"I want you to carry that and cultivate that, and add things to it, because you're going to be in situations I'm not in," said Downing. "The work of being Black and powerful is never done, so make sure you've got your toolkit on you."



For Khalil Derman, a student in his fifth year at Glenview Park Secondary School (GPSS), Downing's words landed with special meaning. Having read Downing's book, Saga Boy, he had an extra layer of knowledge about the author and musical artist as he listened to his words of wisdom on building a Black Brilliance toolkit.

"I actually wrote an essay on it for English class. I compared it to the movie Moonlight, and the struggles with identity," said Derman. "Today was really good."

This marks the second time that Derman has attended a Black Brilliance Conference, with the last in-person event being in 2019. His perspective has shifted from that of a Grade 9 to a fifth year student, but he still took away new helpful lessons and made joyful memories.

"I love coming back here," said Derman. "Each time I've had a little bit of a different experience, but it's always been good."

Following lunch, students broke off into breakout sessions on a range of topics offered in response to what students asked for, from Bold Black Boys to Black Girl Magic. Derman took part in the Black and On a Team discussion, where he was able to talk freely with those who have similar lived experiences of being Black and on a sports team. For him, it was a rare chance to be able to gather together with other Black students and staff to learn and share.

"It's just something I don't get to see very often," said Derman.



Jehan Cameron, a Grade 11 student at Huron Heights Secondary School (HHSS) echoed similar feelings about the opportunity to gather together with so many other Black students and staff from across the WRDSB.

"It was really inspiring," said Cameron. "I've never really been in a room with that many people like me."

Cameron explained that the open, welcoming and supportive energy in the room made her feel at ease as soon as she arrived.

"It was nice to see a big community of people," said Cameron. "It made me feel better about being here, too."

One aspect of Downing's Black Brilliance Toolkit stood out the most for Cameron: Self-Esteem.

“I found that really powerful,” said Cameron. “I think I’ll carry that with me, to be more secure in myself.”

It was Cameron’s first time at the Black Brilliance Conference, and she got even more than she bargained for.

“I wanted to make more connections with Black people and learn more about my culture and my history and be proud of myself,” said Cameron. “I think everyone should come and experience this.”

The experiences of Derman and Cameron represent those of the many who have attended WRDSB Black Brilliance Conferences. The event presents a unique opportunity for celebration, joy and learning - together, these support student well-being, and ultimately, their academic achievement.



Chris Ashley is the head of the history department at Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational School (KCI) and highlighted the student-directed nature of the entire Black Brilliance Conference.

“There’s a thirst for knowledge,” said Ashley. “The students really brought forth a will to understand what’s going on around them.”

Ashley, who has attended Black Brilliance Conferences in the past, saw a number of returning students, demonstrating the value of what they receive by taking part. He explained that this offers a safe space for students to share about their experiences and how they impacted them with people who get it.

“Students have the freedom to say some of the things that they hold in,” said Ashley. “I wish I could have had this experience when I was in high school.”



Teneile Warren, an Equity and Inclusion officer with the WRDSB, led the planning for this year’s Black Brilliance Conference. Warren shared how the event was built and led by student voice, in response to needs they communicated in a survey. Though this event involved staff who helped to bring the pieces together, it was unquestionably a student conference.

“We really curated the spaces based on what students shared with us about the ways in which they feel marginalized in school,” said Warren. “We really listened to what they wanted to talk about.”

As they reflected on what they hope students involved will take from this experience, Warren focused on the positive emotions.

“Honestly, just joy. The laughter, and the smiling, and the gathering and the being - that’s what I want them to take,” said Warren. “They built a community here, and all we had to do was create the space for them to connect with each other and they did the rest.”

Cameron summed up the day from her perspective as the event came to a close.

“It’s Black Brilliance and it’s good to see.”



The Students We Serve



Finding Purpose in Eliminating Discrimination

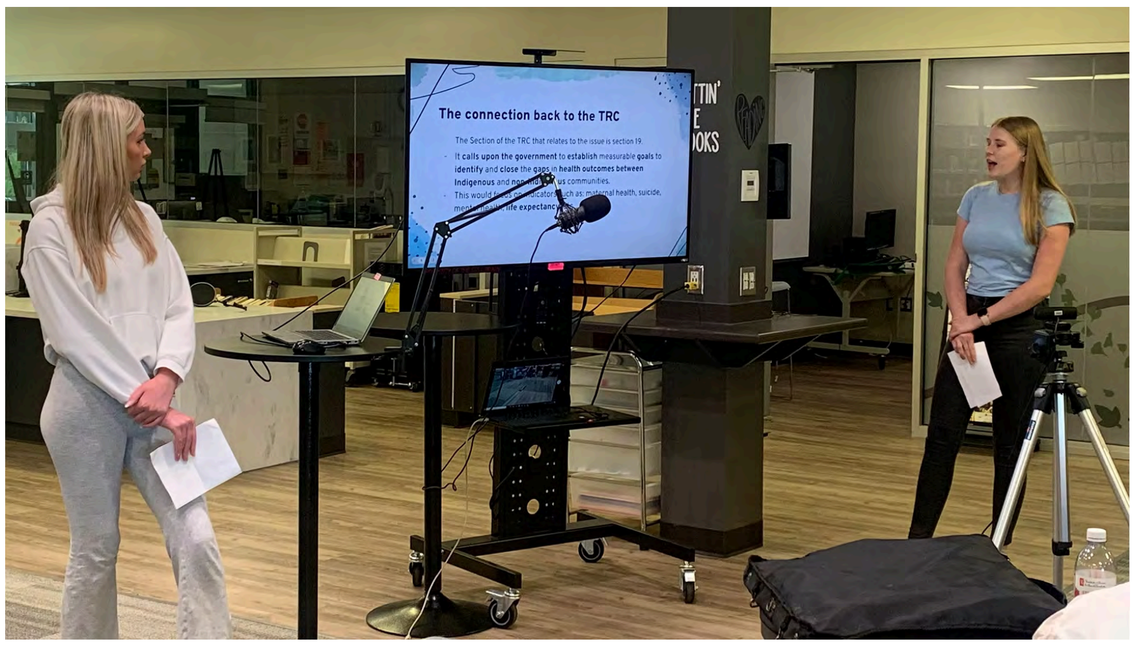


Showcasing Black Brilliance in the WRDSB

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Bringing Innovation to Secondary Students Across the WRDSB



Students at five secondary schools in the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) are becoming better prepared for the world that they will graduate into thanks to a design thinking approach by their educators. The approach recognizes that when current students enter the working world, they will be facing problems we don't yet know, and doing jobs that have yet to be created.

With this challenge in mind, and recognizing the Waterloo Region community's reputation as a hub of innovation in Ontario and Canada, the WRDSB partnered with Smart Waterloo Region (SWR). Together, we are supporting a ground-up approach for WRDSB educators in learning how to use the Global Innovation Management Institute's (GIMI) Impact Program in their classrooms to inspire students to take a design thinking approach to solving real-world problems in their communities.

Grayson Bass is the manager of the Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab, and shared some insight on what the partnership means for all in our community.

"Both the WRDSB and the Region of Waterloo have united with a goal of making Waterloo Region the best community for children and youth. Our partnership with the WRDSB allows us to connect with and support educators, students, and communities, as we help them implement the GIMI Impact Program in their classrooms. I could not be happier with the results and how we have been able to partner with WRDSB," said Bass. "The results are inspiring."

Carli Parsons, Sandy Millar and Stephen Gray are three secondary vice principals who are leading this effort in the WRDSB, and described how this effort began with three rural secondary schools during the 2021-22 school year. This included Elmira District Secondary School (EDSS), Southwood Secondary School (SSS) and Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School (WODSS).

"Innovation really does begin on the fringes, so let's take these three rural schools and we will pilot this innovation curriculum at our three sites," said Parsons. "The idea was to encourage students to look within the school and within their community for problems and challenges and use this design thinking curriculum to propose solutions."

The pilot program that impacted over 300 students was a resounding success, Millar explained, and now the effort has entered phase two, expanding to include two additional secondary schools: Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute (CHCI) and Jacob Hespeler Secondary School (JHSS) led by Vice Principals Christine Moser and Adrian Blair. The reach of the program in the 2022-23 school year will impact approximately 800 secondary students.

Design Thinking in the Classroom

To help prepare to introduce this framework to their classrooms, teachers from each of the five secondary schools came together at Communitech in Kitchener to learn about the GIMI Impact Framework, and how it can be applied to a range of subjects.



During the first year of the program, teachers used the design thinking approach to support students at all levels in engaging with a variety of subjects, from math, to geography, to English, to Indigenous studies, to science.

"One teacher ran his entire English class as a design thinking challenge," said Parsons. "The students went through the design thinking process over the course of the semester. The learning and creativity that happened in that classroom was incredible."

Whatever the subject, students begin by identifying a problem that either they, or someone else in their community has experienced. They then start to assess possible solutions to the issue, by thinking about the user's experience.

Tapping Into Students' Passion, Joy, Data and Desire to Make a Difference

"They're identifying something that's important to them," said Gray, helping students to uncover their passion – a subject or topic they care about, and are interested in learning more about.

"Working on something that you're passionate about, it's easy to find joy in it," Gray said.

As students work through identifying the pinch point of the problem, they engage in empathy work to better understand the end users. This includes soliciting student voice as a guiding factor for their projects.

"They conducted interviews, ran case studies and created surveys within both the school and the community," said Parsons. "Tapping into real data and anecdotal evidence to support their work."

It all culminates in a "pitch day" at each school, where students pitch their solution to representatives from Smart Waterloo Region (SWR), for the opportunity to see their plan funded and executed in the real world. It's the ultimate expression of student voice, with an opportunity to have a tangible impact on the community around them.

"You can see the passion, excitement and solutions that each of the students involved brings to their projects," said Bass. "We're so excited to see what the students will accomplish this year and we can't wait to fund a second round of projects!"

"We're looking at kids driving their learning, working through processes and actually seeing their projects get funded," said Millar.

This past school year, some of the the funded projects included:

- Smartphone application focused on water quality testing
- Gender-affirming clothing fund
- Territorial acknowledgment plaques at regional airports
- Sexual assault and crisis training program

Beyond seeing their visions come to reality, the students are building skills in the classroom that will better prepare them for whatever their post-secondary pathway may be, Gray explained. These are also known as Global Competencies – attributes that help students meet the shifting and ongoing demands of life, work and learning.

"It's communication, collaboration, critical thinking," he said. "It's hard to go through this process and not gain these skills, based on the framework that's been laid out."

One great strength of this approach, is that it unlocks the students' own knowledge and experiences as assets in achieving academically, and ultimately, in earning them credits in secondary school. Their own lived experiences are engaged as they work to identify a problem or concern in their community, and set about working together to find a solution.

"Your experience matters and your experience is going to contribute to your success in school," said Parsons. "You can make change."

Ultimately, this supports all students in succeeding in the classroom. Students who have a greater sense of well-being at school, are also more likely to have higher levels of academic achievement.

Transforming Long-Held Teaching Methods

As they take on another year of the GIMI Impact Program in the WRDSB, Parsons, Millar and Gray, along with all of the educators involved, look forward to what's ahead. For many educators, this process involves letting go of long-held methods in their teaching, and rethinking their entire approach. Though it isn't easy, they know just how much it will help to support the academic success of all the students who take part. Many of the educators spoke about increases to their own sense of joy and well-being as they went through the process.

"The students are excited and engaged in their learning, and so are their teachers," said Parsons. "It's a lot of work, and a lot of coordination, but the rewards are just so substantial."

Overall, this unique WRDSB-led approach in partnership with SWR allows students to bring learning to life in the real world, by giving them opportunities for leadership in their own communities. It allows them to combine what they've learned in the classroom across subject areas, bringing all of their skills and talents together for a project they care deeply about.

Partnership Creating Microforests Across Waterloo Region

Reduced Child Care Costs a Benefit For All in the WRDSB

Elevating Accessibility in the WRDSB

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Celebrating Sikh Heritage Month in April 2022



In April 2022, staff and students from across the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) were invited to celebrate Sikh Heritage Month by taking this opportunity to learn more about Sikh culture, language, identity and heritage. The WRDSB's Sikh Affinity Group, along with staff from the Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Department (IEHR) offered three innovative learning opportunities for students, depending on their grade-level:

- A virtual interactive choice board
- Allowed students to explore a selection of resources to learn more for Sikh Heritage Month
- Reading of Kamal's Kes, written and illustrated by Baljinder Kaur
- A live-streamed reading of the 2021 children's book that focuses on body positivity and confronting female standards of beauty
- Keynote address from Dr. Jaspreet Bal
- The live-streamed address from Dr. Bal focused on Sikh identity and experiences of Sikhs in the classroom

While these learning opportunities support students and staff who identify as Sikh, they go further than that. Every student's learning is enriched by gaining a greater understanding of the diverse communities that exist in Waterloo Region.

The Sikh Affinity Group would like to thank the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) – Sikh Heritage Month Volunteer Planning Committee for their collaborative partnership in the creation of these learning materials for students.

WRDSB Acknowledges Sikh Heritage Month & Celebrates Vaisakhi

Students and staff were also invited to revisit the following video, originally created in 2021, to help extend their learning for Sikh Heritage Month.



Affinity Groups

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Sparking a Passion for Welding at Cameron Heights



More WRDSB Students Supported in Reaching Graduation and Beyond



Democratizing Healthcare and Testing with Skills Learned in the WRDSB

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Democratizing Healthcare and Testing with Skills Learned in the WRDSB



"I can't put it into words how grateful I am for those teachers at WCI."

In October 2022, Neil Mitra had only been at university for a little over a month, but he was already feeling successful, due in no small part to what he learned as a student in the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB).

"It's been lots of fun and I'm loving all my courses," Neil said in October. "My first month here at UBC has been quite fruitful. I'm really looking forward to the next couple of months."

Neil, who graduated from Waterloo Collegiate Institute (WCI) in early 2022, is studying Engineering at the University of British Columbia (UBC). We caught up with Neil in May 2022 to talk about the multiplex cardiac testing device he is developing with his company, Mitra Biotechnologies.



For Mitra, this work hits close to home.
"In 2019, I lost my close Aunt due to a heart attack," said Mitra.

Through this experience, he was inspired to find a way to improve the level of care available to those suffering a heart attack around the world. In May of 2019, he created the concept for his device and filed a provisional patent.

"We realized that the pressing issue is that these doctors are unable to get cardiac biomarkers at the point of care," said Mitra.

So what does his device do? Built on a small piece of paper, it uses microfluidics and a nanofilter to separate the plasma from whole blood to test for a variety of protein biomarkers related to heart attacks. These biomarkers can tell doctors which part of the heart is being damaged, and allow them to determine the best treatment more quickly. Currently available blood tests are slower by comparison, delaying treatment.

"Right now, it would take you nearly an hour to detect these biomarkers and we can do it in five minutes with our system," said Mitra. "For cardiac surgeons, time is tissue. Time is the golden elixir for saving a patient's life."

The innovative outlook and approach that Neil embodies in his work is emblematic of the spirit of Waterloo Region, and the type of learning that takes place in WRDSB schools and classrooms each and every day.

Mitra's vision and outstanding commitment to biotechnology haven't gone unnoticed. He was named a Global Teen Leader. Led by the We Are Family Foundation (WAFF), Global Teen Leaders are selected for their work addressing the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Their goal is to support, amplify and mentor "the work of global youth leaders around the world who are crucial to solving the most pressing problems facing our planet."

Work continues on the device, as the company is now looking to raise funds to begin prototyping and testing with patient samples. Neil is optimistic, as the costs associated with testing their device are lower than typical medical technology.

"Our device is paper-based, so we get to cut down a lot of those costs in prototyping," said Neil.

In August 2022, they hit an important milestone. The nanomaterial in their paper-based device hit near centrifugation separation of solid blood products from whole human blood. This helps to demonstrate the effectiveness of their device that aims to revolutionize the speed with which heart attacks can be identified and treated.

Blood-Plasma Separation through Mitra Biotechnologies' novel nanomaterial-integrated paper de
Mitra Biotechnologies

Watch on

"It's been busy," said Neil with a smile.

Though he hadn't had much spare time to reflect, he had recognized how well his teachers prepared him for his post-secondary pathway.

"I can't put it into words how grateful I am for those teachers at WCI," said Neil. "Without them, university would be exponentially more difficult."

Neil reminisced about how the time he spent in advanced placement math, calculus and physics classes gave him a leg up on his peers. For example, in his first year physics class at UBC, they were solving problems in three dimensions using matrices. This is familiar territory for Neil, thanks to Mr. Eaton at WCI, who taught this method for solving in two dimensions.

"We already learned that in high school, at WCI," said Neil. "I feel pretty grateful for that."

He credits Mr. Eaton, along with Mrs. McCarl Palmer, Ms. Banit, Mr. Brown and Mr. Cressman for helping him to be prepared for the challenges of post-secondary education.

This type of excellence in education and in preparing students for their chosen pathways can be seen at secondary schools across the WRDSB. Educators, no matter their field of study, are committed to ensuring that students have the skills and knowledge they need to hit the ground running when they graduate.

Neil has enjoyed the opportunity to bring his learning to bear at UBC.

"Taking all my learnings from high school and applying it here, has been quite fun," said Neil.

What he took with him is more than just theoretical knowledge – though his bookshelf is now full of thick university textbooks, his high school notes have a special place on the shelf.

"I knew that it would be helpful for university."



The Students We Serve



Finding Purpose in Eliminating Discrimination



Showcasing Black Brilliance in the WRDSB

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Educating Students, Together with Our Partners



The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) is not alone in the work of educating and supporting the students we serve in reaching their fullest potential. We do this work together with our partners: parents, caregivers, families, community members, local organizations and businesses.

The unique opportunities available as a result of these productive relationships mean that WRDSB students have chances to gain skills and knowledge that may not otherwise be available to them. Here are just a few of the opportunities our partnerships created in 2022:



Maple Syrup at the Sugarbush with the White Owl Native Ancestry Association (WONAA)

As temperatures began to thaw in early 2022, WRDSB Outdoor and Environmental Education specialists worked in partnership with members of the White Owl Native Ancestry Association (WONAA) to provide Grade 3 students with an extraordinary experiential learning opportunity.

When the sap started to run from the maple trees, students began to venture out to the WONAA sugar bush. They learned all about maple sugaring, from the original techniques to modern production methods. This offered connections to a variety of subject areas, including:

- Social studies
- Science
- Math

“It was great having the Grade 3s, just to be able to share the forest and the experience of making maple syrup here,” said Dave Skene, Director of WONAA. “It was a good season, both with the kids and with making maple syrup.”

Overall, it was a sweet spring of producing maple syrup, and outdoor learning for WRDSB students in partnership with WONAA.

Maple Syrup at the Sugarbush
WRDSB

Watch on



Career Expo with Build a Dream

Students, parents and caregivers packed the Bingemans Conference Centre in November 2022 for the first in-person Build a Dream Career Discovery Expo in Waterloo Region since before the pandemic.

Nour Hachem-Fawaz is the president and founder of Build a Dream, which aims to promote the variety of career opportunities for women and those who identify as women.

“It’s really exciting” to be back in-person, explained Hachem-Fawaz. Attendees had the chance to meet with over 40 exhibitors, showcasing career opportunities and pathways ranging from the local carpenters’ union to Region of Waterloo Paramedics.

She credits the joint partnership between the WRDSB, Waterloo Catholic District School Board (WCDSB), Upper-Grand District School Board (UGDSB) and Wellington Catholic District School Board (WCDSB) for making the career expo possible. It provides

students in these boards with the unique opportunity to connect directly with professionals and employers while learning more about the pathways available to them.

“It takes school board partnerships to make these events happen,” said Hachem-Fawaz. “Without them, we wouldn’t be able to tap into the young minds and have parents at the table as they make these really important life decisions.”

Read more: Students Building a Dream for their Future Careers



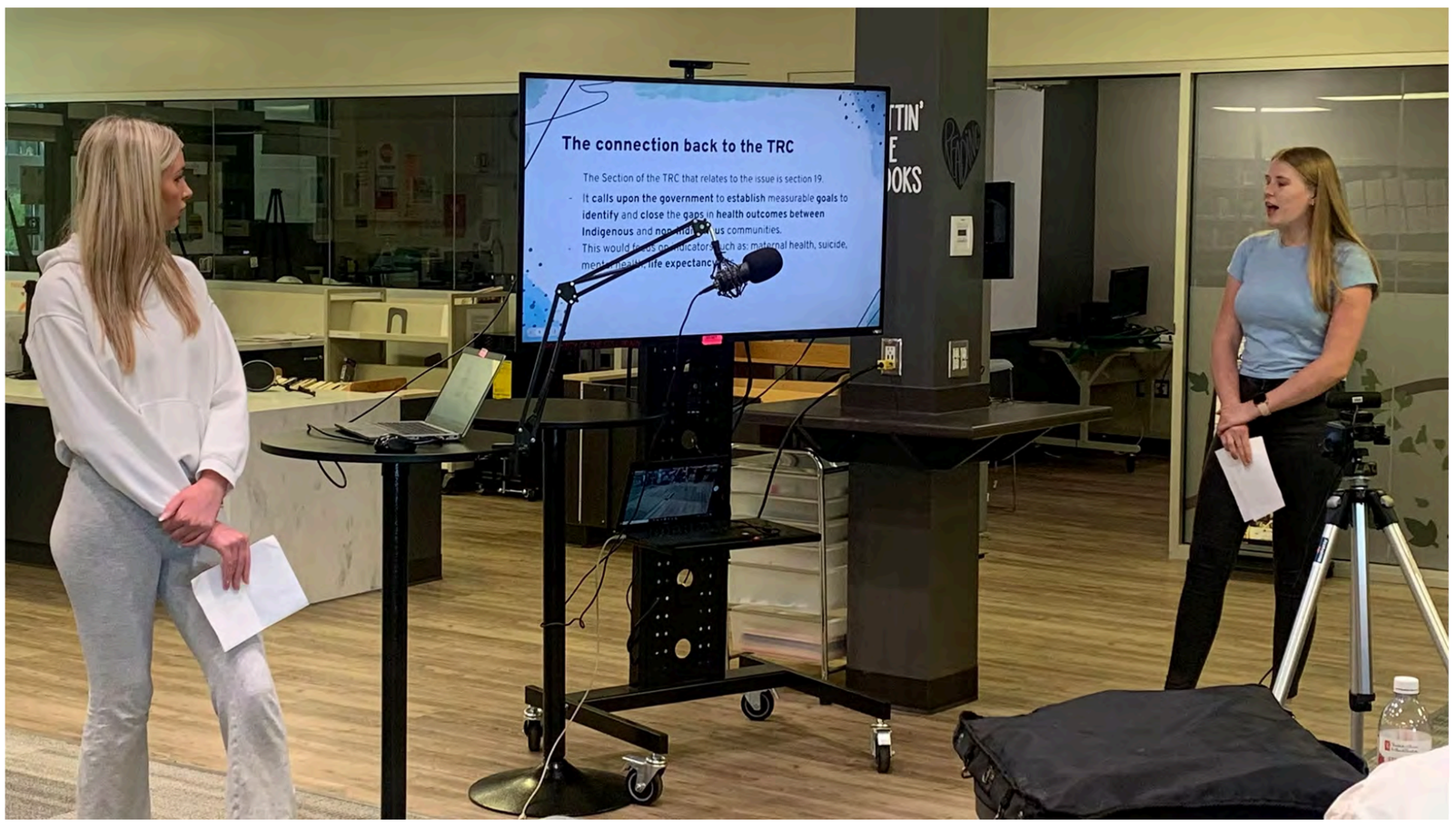
Electric Vehicle Challenge with the University of Waterloo

The sounds of cheering nearly drowned out the low purr of electric motors during the Waterloo High School Electric Vehicle (EV) Challenge at the University of Waterloo in May of 2022. The endurance racing event invited secondary students from the WRDSB and across Ontario to compete in electric vehicles of their own design and construction. This included students from Bluevale Collegiate Institute (BCI), Eastwood Collegiate Institute (ECI), Laurel Heights Secondary School (LHSS) and Preston High School (PHS).

This extraordinary opportunity allows students to put the skills and knowledge learned in the classroom into action as they innovate solutions to complex problems, and prepare for their post-secondary pathways in a world where the green technologies industry is ever-growing.

The EV Challenge is just one of many unique opportunities that exist for WRDSB students, thanks in large part to the close partnerships that exist between the WRDSB and the post-secondary educational institutions in Waterloo Region.

Read more: Students Get Charged Up For Electric Vehicle Challenge



GIMI Impact Program with Smart Waterloo Region

Students at five secondary schools in the WRDSB are becoming better prepared for the world that they will graduate into thanks to a design thinking approach by their educators. The approach recognizes that when current students enter the working world, they will be facing problems we don't yet know, and doing jobs that have yet to be created.

With this challenge in mind, and recognizing the Waterloo Region's reputation as a hub of innovation in Ontario and Canada, the WRDSB partnered with Smart Waterloo Region (SWR). Together, we are supporting a ground-up approach for WRDSB educators in learning how to use the Global Innovation Management Institute's (GIMI) Impact Program in their classrooms to inspire students to take a design thinking approach to solving real-world problems in their communities.

Grayson Bass is the manager of the Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab, and shared some insight on what the partnership means for all in our community.

"Both the WRDSB and the Region of Waterloo have united with a goal of making Waterloo Region the best community for children and youth. Our partnership with the WRDSB allows us to connect with and support educators, students, and communities, as we help them implement the GIMI Impact Program in their classrooms. I could not be happier with the results and how we have been able to partner with WRDSB," said Bass. "The results are inspiring."

Read more: Bringing Innovation to Secondary Students Across the WRDSB



Microforests with Sustainable Waterloo Region and the Grand River Conservation Authority

The Microforest Planting Project, led by Sustainable Waterloo Region (SWR), is a unique partnership that includes the WRDSB, Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA), and local businesses whose employees volunteer to help plant the microforests. Together, these organizations are creating new resources for students and communities, while working to fight climate change.

Microforests, with trees and shrubs planted together in close proximity, are more effective than having the same number of trees planted across a larger area. This innovative approach is particularly beneficial in urban environments as it provides enhanced ecological, climate, and human benefits.

Beyond the environmental benefits, microforests offer numerous advantages for the students who attend the schools where they are planted. They offer additional shade in the schoolyard, and perhaps even more importantly, additional outdoor educational opportunities as they feature a variety of fauna and flora to study.

Learning outdoors through observation, exploration and play - opportunities for which are available in a microforest - supports student well-being. Benefits go beyond wellness alone, with a direct connection between academic achievement and student well-being.

Read more: Partnership Creating Microforests Across Waterloo Region



[Bringing Innovation to Secondary Students Across the WRDSB]



[Teacher Captures Student Portraits 10 Years Apart]



[Myths and Facts About Autism]

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Elevating Accessibility in the WRDSB



For Mel Lavoie and the entire Facilities Services team at the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), accessibility is non-negotiable. Lavoie is a project coordinator and provided an overview of some of the innovative work undertaken to ensure WRDSB schools, offices and learning spaces are accessible for all that we serve.



“It’s just something that you have to have,” said Lavoie.

With more than 122 schools and sites, and some dating back to the 19th century, there is a broad range of buildings and spaces in the WRDSB. Ensuring that they are accessible can present a myriad of challenges, depending on a variety of factors. Lavoie explained, this variety is something he enjoys about his job, providing a new problem to solve with each project.

“I think it’s always exciting. It’s like getting a new job every year, because you do something different and it’s completely different,” said Lavoie.



Lavoie provided an overview of the project at Margaret Avenue Senior Public School in Kitchener, which saw the installation of two new elevators. Originally built in 1894, this addition was necessary to ensure that all students, staff and community members were able to access and enjoy the school space. It required an innovative solution to connect each of the floors in an accessible manner.

“If you’re in a wheelchair, you would not be able to come to this building,” said Lavoie.

The project at Margaret Avenue Senior PS was a special one for Lavoie, who attended the school as a student in 1965. It was a unique feeling to come back and help ensure the school continues to support students for decades to come.

“It’s different, going back to a school you went to, and seeing what it was like,” said Lavoie. “It just gives you that special thing.”

Silvana Hoxha is the principal at Margaret Avenue Senior PS and explained what a difference the accessibility upgrades made for the people who learn and work at the school.

“It’s really impacted everyone in the school,” said Hoxha. “Everyone was able to see and have an entry point in the school.”

Accessible buildings help to support the well-being of all students and staff who learn and work in them. This is especially important for a school, given the direct connection between well-being and academic achievement.



Looking to the near future, two accessibility-focused projects will bring elevators and other upgrades to schools in the WRDSB. Already underway, MacGregor PS in Waterloo is set to receive an elevator. A similar project at King Edward PS in Kitchener is also on the horizon.



With a cost of roughly $800,000 to $1 million to install an elevator at a school, these are serious construction projects. The work doesn't happen overnight.

Ron Dallan is the capital projects manager for the WRDSB and explained that these projects take up to a year to complete. During that time, facilities staff work closely with school staff to minimize interruptions and allow students to continue to learn as normally as possible. For instance, at MacGregor PS, they installed a temporary, insulated wall to limit the noise coming from areas under construction.

"These aren't like ordering a pizza," said Dallan. "There's a lot of planning involved. The coordinators are amazing at doing that, working with the principal at the school to make it safe."



Accessibility goes far beyond elevators, though. Along with the installation of any elevator at a school, barrier-free washrooms are also installed on every floor reachable by that elevator. These washrooms, also known as washrooms for everyone, include features such as a power door, additional physical supports and an alarm to request assistance.



Accessible signage around the building includes raised braille, ensuring that everyone is able to navigate the school. Consideration extends to classrooms, too, where sound fields are installed so that every student in the classroom can hear the teacher just as well as those seated at the front. Sound fields are an example of an accessibility feature that is necessary for some, but good for all as it allows everyone to better understand the educator.

“All the kids can hear the same throughout the classroom. It’s projecting that sound for them,” said Lavoie.

For Lavoie and Dallan, this work is about more than just completing a construction project. It’s about building spaces that are supportive and welcoming for all students, staff and community members. Dallan explained just how much it means to the whole team.

“You’re given this privilege, to make a difference to people you’ll never even meet,” said Dallan. “It is something to be proud of.”

As a longtime skier, Lavoie has had his fair share of leg injuries and has first-hand experience with relying on supportive devices to get around. He explained how this time on crutches expanded his perspective on the importance of accessibility.



“When you go on crutches, you start understanding what accessibility means to people. Like what it truly means,” said Lavoie.

Talking to Lavoie, it’s clear that this work is more than a job to him. He has a passion for creating schools that are supportive of all.

“To have a facility that’s for everyone, that’s always motivated me,” said Lavoie. “That’s the first step, right?”

Accessibility in the WRDSB

- View Accessibility Status by School

Learn more about the WRDSB 2021-2026 Accessibility Plan





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Finding Purpose in Eliminating Discrimination



Hana Adham, a Grade 12 student in the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), was driven to help eliminate racial discrimination. The spark that ignited her interest in social justice and human rights began with the opportunity to take part in the Ripple Effect Education (TREE) and Kindred Credit Union's Peace Innovators Scholarship and Mentoring Program.

"I signed up for it, and honestly I wasn't expecting to be getting one of the spots," said Hana.

Offered through the University of Waterloo (UW), the Peace Innovators Scholarship and Mentoring Program is just one of many unique opportunities available to WRDSB students thanks to the close partnerships that exist with local post-secondary education institutions in Waterloo Region.

When the acceptance email arrived in her inbox, she was pleasantly surprised to see it. The experience allowed Hana to weigh a variety of possibilities for her focus in the mentorship program, leading her to uncover a passion for working to help eliminate racial discrimination.

"Once I started really exploring...I found my way," said Hana.

Guided by her mentor and teacher, Amanda Newhall, this led to personal learning for her about unconscious biases that one may hold, including those about the values of different pathways after graduating from high school.

"That was a really interesting one for me to navigate," said Hana. "There's no issue with a person going to college rather than university, or maybe not even going to college at all."

As part of the Peace Innovators Scholarship and Mentoring Program, Hana was tasked with creating a final initiative or project. With a blank slate of possibilities in front of her, Hana decided to take an innovative approach to having a tangible impact on students in the WRDSB, and those in the community.

She hosted an anti-racism conference for teachers. Her aim was to help teachers understand how much of a difference they can make for students.

"I created the conference specifically for teachers because I felt they had the most impact," said Hana. "There are minor things that teachers can change to completely change someone's experience."

Based on lessons learned during the conference for teachers, Hana began working on an anti-racism suggestions sheet for teachers, with a goal to reach even more teachers looking to make changes to create a more inclusive classroom.

Hana rooted the foundation of her approach in student voice, including a survey she conducted with current and former students. She heard loud and clear from students about the importance of seeing themselves and their identities reflected in what they are learning.

"Representation really matters," said Hana.

Hana's advice for teachers looking to ensure students feel represented is to try to incorporate culturally relevant material into their teaching. Find connections to the curriculum that allow students to see themselves and their identities reflected in the learning.

Representation made a difference for Hana's experience, and piqued her interest in the field of history.

"My love for history really changed with the history teacher I had in Grade 10. His name is Mr. Chard," explained Hana.

Chard offered students a much more diverse view of history.

"We went from the US involvement in the Second World War to the partition of the subcontinent, to the Vikings in Ireland," said Hana.

For Hana, whose first name is often mispronounced (hun-ah, not han-ah), name pronunciation was an important topic to include as part of the suggestion sheet. Correctly pronouncing a student's name is an important part of showing them they are welcome and respected.

"That's me," said Hana. "That's what my parents named me. I'm not okay with you anglicizing my name."

Correct name pronunciation is just one small way educators can support the well-being, and thus the academic success, of all students. This small but important gesture goes a long way to ensuring that every student feels valued in the classroom and supported in their learning.

Hana's guidance for teachers is to take on the responsibility for knowing how to pronounce student names, and not expect to be corrected publicly by the student. Connect one-on-one with the student to ask, and write down the phonetic spelling for easy reference.

Hana also included a quote from Henry David Thoreau:

“A name pronounced is the recognition of the individual to whom it belongs. He who can pronounce my name aright, he can call me, and is entitled to my love and service.”

For her, it means that caring enough to try to correctly pronounce a name is the first step in building mutually respectful relationships.

“Names are a very basic thing. If you can’t even put in the effort to pronounce that right, then I don’t think you’re entitled to know me as a person,” said Hana.

Correct name pronunciation goes further than supporting only students from historically marginalized communities. A correctly pronounced name will help every student to feel an equal part of the classroom community, and that their contributions to the learning experience are valued equally. This is just one way WRDSB educators can help support the most marginalized students, while maintaining excellence for all.

Hana knows that doing this work can be complex and that some teachers may be concerned about making missteps. She recommends they reach out to WRDSB’s Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Department to ask any questions they may have.

As Hana reflects on what she has accomplished and prepares to embark on the next stage in her learning journey, her aim remains to make a difference – no matter how small.

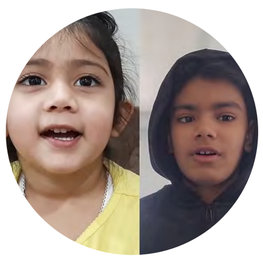
“Even if I can just change one teacher’s mindset…I feel satisfied with that.”



Celebrating Sikh Heritage Month in April 2022



Asian Affinity Group Marks Asian Heritage Month



My Language - In the Words of Students

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Gaining an Appreciation for the Vastness of the Universe at Space Camp



Ethan Warren is ready to take the next steps – especially when it comes to his passion for computer science and space exploration. Warren, a blind Grade 12 student in his fifth year at Elmira District Secondary School (EDSS), attended the Space Camp for Interested Visually Impaired Students at the U.S. Space & Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama.

The experience allowed him to connect with like minded peers and professionals, while taking part in simulated space exploration missions. Warren explained the opportunity allowed him to make new connections while learning more about the boundless nature of space.

“I networked with a lot of interesting people and gained a greater appreciation for the vastness of the universe,” said Warren.

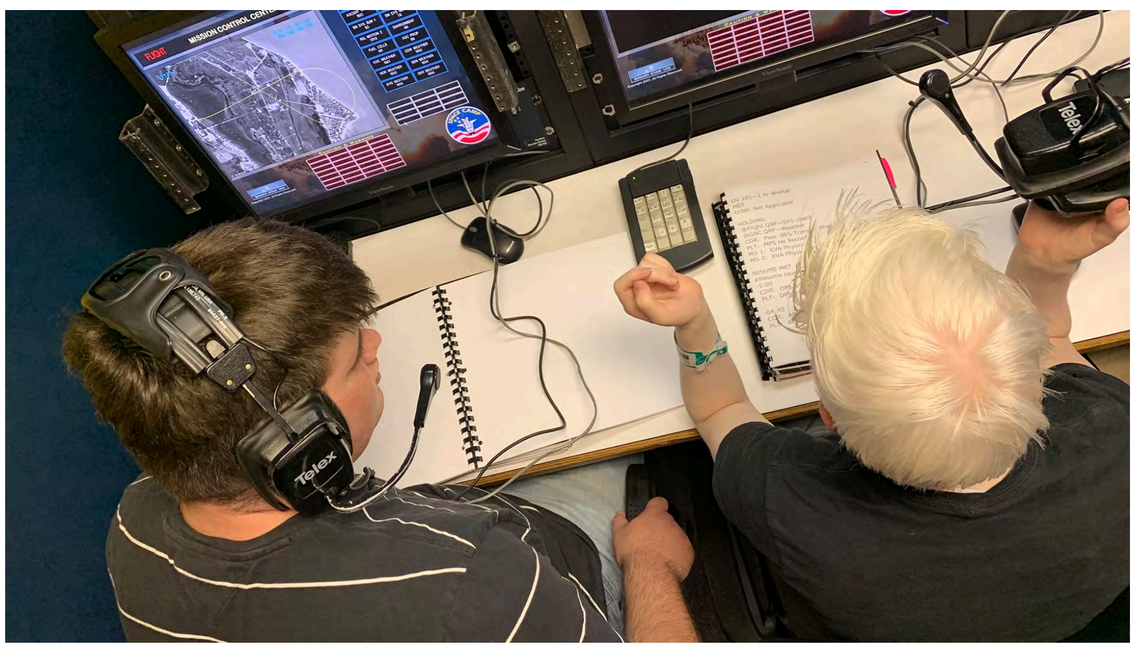
As he reflected on his experience, the simulated missions stood out as his favourite part. For one of these missions, he took the controls on the simulated flight deck as the shuttle commander. He was blown away by how realistic the simulation was for those taking part.

“It was amazing. It was an exact replica of the shuttle flight deck,” said Warren. “Every button and switch from the Space Shuttle was recreated to perfection.”

The final simulated mission lasted three hours, and required the students involved to coordinate between Mission Control, the Space Shuttle, and the International Space Station. They launched the shuttle, flew it up to the space station, exchanged crews and flew it back down to Earth.

At each step, Warren explained they were following detailed realistic procedures to ensure the success of their mission. Collaboration was key, and was one of his main takeaways from this experience.

“Teamwork was essential to success,” said Warren.



Apart from the simulated missions, one other experience really stood out for Ethan: a special planetarium show designed especially for the students taking part in this space camp, featuring the sounds of the universe.

“One of my favourite ones was probably the simplest,” said Warren. “It was just the wind of Mars heard through the microphone of one of the rovers. It’s just haunting.”

Warren has taken what he learned about the power of collaboration and teamwork and continues to apply it in his co-operative education placement at the University of Waterloo (UW) in the Computer Science Computing Facility (CSCF) for the Computer Science department.

Warren’s placement at UW is emblematic of the close partnership that exists between the WRDSB and the post-secondary institutions in Waterloo Region, helping to offer students in our school board unique learning opportunities as they build skills for their future careers.

He’s enjoyed the opportunity to immerse himself in the culture and environment of computer science, and build connections with professionals who work in this field every day. More recently, he was called upon to help address a challenge some students were experiencing with their online course folders.

“They had a problem and they asked me if I could write a program to fix it,” said Warren. “Students at the University of Waterloo will be able to use the tools that I’ve written.”

Warren's ability to find innovative solutions to complex problems is supported jointly by the learning he has done in the classroom at EDSS and the practical experience he's gained during this co-op placement.

For Warren, who hopes to one day be a professor of computer science, this experience has been priceless in helping him prepare for his post-secondary pathway. He has applied to the UW Computer Science program, feeling better prepared thanks to the opportunities provided by his co-op placement. He wholeheartedly recommends it for any students who are beginning to look at next steps on their learning pathways.

"If you have any idea of what you want to do as a career, give it a shot," said Warren.

Staff across the WRDSB centre student voice when helping them to prepare for their chosen future career. From the skilled trades, to the computer science field, they work together to explore potential co-operative education or experiential learning opportunities that will give them hands-on experience in the workplace.

As he took a moment to contemplate the experiences that have brought him here, Warren shared his eagerness to embark upon his post-secondary learning journey.

"I finally feel like I'm actually ready to take that next step," said Warren. "I'm looking forward to it."







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Gaming Brings Remote Learning Students Together



Students in the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) Elementary Remote Learning School (ERLS) came together in a virtual space to learn more about the opportunities available to them in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

Samantha Lammert, a Grade 6 teacher in the ERLS, ran the Girls Who Game club, also known as the Girls of Greatness. Lammert has a passion for STEM and exploring new methods of supporting students in learning the skills they'll need to succeed in the world they will graduate into. She jumped at the opportunity to get involved in the innovative program offered by Dell Technologies.

"I said 'this sounds right up my alley,'" said Lammert.

Girls Who Game focuses on supporting those who are under-represented in STEM, explained Lammert, including students who are female and who identify as female. It aims to offer students the chance to take a look at the pathways available to them. The program offers students unique experiences and learning opportunities, supporting the development of skills and interests that will better prepare them for the next steps on their learning pathways.

"Girls Who Game gives girls the opportunity to learn more about STEM at a younger age," said Lammert.

Embry, one of the students in the club, explained what this opportunity meant to her.

"My favourite part of Girls Who Game was feeling like I had a safe space. I had a space where people were exactly like me, and I felt safe sharing my thoughts here, because no other girls that I really knew were into engineering or building things," said Embry. "I finally have a small, little community, a small little group that I can talk to about this stuff."

As Embry shared, the program is about more than just the students' academic achievements, but puts into action the understanding that a student's well-being supports their academic performance.

The students were using MinecraftEdu (Minecraft Education Edition) to show their work. With the students and Lammert sharing the same virtual space in the game, there are a multitude of learning opportunities, from collaboration, to team building, to exploring ideas and topics in the curriculum. MinecraftEdu also allowed students to provide written explanations of their thinking, alongside their work, allowing Lammert to monitor their progress and provide feedback as they went.

"I can see their learning in real-time," said Lammert. "For me, it's about increasing those competencies. Getting those problem solving skills, collaboration, learning how to communicate with people. Those are the skills that I'm seeing improve through this program."

The students noticed this learning, too. Embry learned the strength in working together on a common goal.

"There's a ton of different perspectives and a ton of different ways to solve one problem. There's not only one solution and it's not only you, always by yourself," said Embry. "You can collaborate with other people and pitch in certain ideas to make the perfect solution."

The experience for students goes well beyond academic learning, though. The eight students in the group have built new friendships with like-minded peers and discovered newfound confidence in sharing their voices, which they use to guide their learning as they work in collaboration to determine the direction of their project.

"Since I've been in Girls Who Game, I've noticed I'm more confident in my opinion and I'm happy to share my ideas with other people," said Aparna.

"My favourite part of Girls Who Game was getting to know all the other girls that are in this group. It's bonding, I guess," said Phoenix. "That's what I like,"

"It's a great place to share your feelings about gaming and also meet some cool people," said Kayleigh.

"Being a part of Girls Who Game makes me feel happy and really connected with who I am. And connected with other people that are like me. It makes me feel really safe and happy, and it gives me a little bit of joy in my day," said Embry.

In 2022, all students in Girls Who Game clubs worked on a challenge related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, they were tasked with analyzing an industry and thinking of creative ways to make it more sustainable. Then, they built their proposal in MinecraftEdu.

"They are building a facility that collects used crayons, and markers that have lost their caps, and makes them into something new," said Lammert.

Hear from the Girls of Greatness about their build:

Girls of Greatness | Girls Who Game
WRDSB

Watch on

The expansion of the WRDSB's elementary Chromebook program means that every student in Grades 6 to 12 has their own device. This ensures equitable access to devices which are important for learning, innovation and well-being. Lammert explained this made starting the program much more straightforward.

"All my students had to do was download Minecraft onto their device," said Lammert. "It meant we were able to focus more on the programming, rather than the logistical part of it."

Students in the club also received a virtual visit from a mentor who works in the STEM field. They provided feedback on their project and shared about their journey in their education and profession.

Lammert encourages any interested teachers to give it a try. There are many supports available from Girls Who Game, MinecraftEdu and in the WRDSB to make it happen. Ultimately, the best part is the opportunity and experiences you'll be able to offer students.

"It's going to be magical."

About Girls Who Game

Girls Who Game is an extracurricular program created by Dell Technologies with partners Microsoft and Intel. It provides an opportunity for underserved students across North America to learn about science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) through gaming. The players learn such skills as computational and critical thinking, communication,

collaboration, creativity, problem-solving, and innovation. The players are empowered to become leaders in STEM related fields.

Learn more about Girls Who Game.



Students Eager to Spread Kindness at Groh PS



Gaining an Appreciation for the Vastness of the Universe at Space Camp



Opportunities Abound in Co-Operative Education

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More WRDSB Students Supported in Reaching Graduation and Beyond



For the first time in two years, families and staff from Huron Height Secondary School (HHSS) were able to come together in-person to celebrate graduating students as they walked across a real stage to receive their diplomas and take the next step on their chosen post-secondary pathways.

This was just one of many commencement and graduation ceremonies taking place across the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), as the Ministry of Education reports notable increases in both four and five year graduation rates at the Board.

In October 2022, more than 1300 people packed Marshall Hall at Bingemans Conference Centre in Kitchener. Jeff Klinck, the principal of HHSS, shared what it was like to be back together to celebrate the accomplishments of all the Huron graduates.

"It feels great," said Klinck. "Especially after not having been able to have a live, in-person commencement for the past two years, there was a lot of excitement about being here today."



Davis Gates was one of the students who crossed the stage that evening, and as he took a moment to reflect, shared what he would miss most about secondary school, and his time in the WRDSB.

"I think, the people," said Gates. "The people really made it what it was. Everyone at Huron is just phenomenal."

Now a month into studying film and television at DePaul University in Chicago, Gates has a renewed perspective on how his teachers helped to prepare him to pursue his dream of becoming a famous movie producer.

"The work is like tenfold, so I want to say thank you to the teachers for preparing us, because it really does help in the long run," said Gates.



Jacquelyn Nguyen is another former HHSS student who received their diploma. She described the emotions she felt as she waited for her name to be called, and a moment that, for her, symbolized the culmination of all that she's learned in the WRDSB.

"It's kind of been like a whirlwind of emotions. When my name was being called, I was super-nervous," said Nguyen. "I'm just super proud of myself for getting this far."

She wanted to let all of the teachers who taught her know just how important a role they play in each student's experiences at school, and how they set them up for success in the future. It goes beyond just academic learning, though, as a student's achievement in the classroom is directly related to their well-being.

"I don't think they realize the impact that they make on students' lives," said Nguyen. "There's always that one teacher that every student has a connection with, whether they've taught them or just had an impact on them when they weren't feeling the greatest."



Samara Washo also collected her diploma on October 21. She shared how she felt better prepared to study public health at the University of Waterloo, thanks to what she learned in the Health and Wellness Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program. The classes she took covered many of the same subjects and topics she's learning about at university.

"I think it did give me a bit of an edge," said Washo. "I do have knowledge about what we're learning, so it's really helping."

Washo especially pointed out the head start the SHSM program offered her. The experiential learning opportunities available through the WRDSB SHSM program allowed her to build the skills she needed for the first year of university, before she got there.

"A lot of it is what I learned already with the Specialist High Skills Major Program, so it's really easy to apply that knowledge," said Washo.



These students are not alone in the feeling of being set up for success on their chosen post-secondary pathways thanks to what they learned in the WRDSB. The latest data from the Ministry of Education shows that more WRDSB students are successfully graduating secondary school than in past years.

The number of WRDSB students who graduate in five years increased 2.2% to 85.9%, and the number of students who graduate in four years increased by 4.7% to 76.5%. While graduation rates are just one benchmark used to ensure the effectiveness of efforts to support students, they are a good sign efforts are working.

As a school board, we remain committed to supporting all students to graduate, reach their potential and find success wherever life takes them. The WRDSB's new Strategic Plan developed by Trustees through broad consultation, builds on the progress we have been making. Through this plan, we are increasing the focus on mathematics, literacy, and supporting the development of students' capacity for compassion, creativity, curiosity and social responsibility.

We're also committed to ensuring student voices are heard. We know that students who feel heard, who feel like they belong, and who find their learning relevant, perform better academically and have a greater understanding of how what they're learning can positively impact the world.

This was certainly the case for Gates, Nguyen and Washo.



As the evening came to a close at Bingemans Conference Centre, Klinck reflected on advice he had for students who are taking the next step in their learning journeys.

"Keep working hard, it brings its own reward," said Klinck. "Be a good person, all those good things that you were taught to do in Kindergarten, all apply to adulthood, too."



Bringing Innovation to Secondary Students Across the WRDSB



Teacher Captures Student Portraits 10 Years Apart



Myths and Facts About Autism

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My Language - In the Words of Students



In honour of International Mother Language Day in February 2022, we asked Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) students in our International and Indigenous Languages Program (IILP) to tell us why learning their mother language was important to them.

The WRDSB IILP offers students the opportunity to learn 21 languages, from Albanian to Vietnamese. This innovative program also allows secondary students taking part to earn a half credit for their participation, while gaining language skills that will support them throughout their learning and in sharing their voices in a variety of languages.

Here's what students told us:

Afseen Anam | Bengali

One of our littlest learners, Junior Kindergarten student Afseen taught us how to say "How are you?" in Bengali.

Afseen | My Language
WRDSB

Watch on

Zeel Vyas | Gujarati

Meet Zeel, a student at Huron Heights Secondary School, who has been learning Gujarati for 6 years in the WRDSB.

Zeel | My Language
WRDSB

Watch on

Kaysan Ullah | Bengali

Grade 3 student Kaysan taught us how to say "I love Bangladesh" in Bengali.

Kaysan | My Language
WRDSB

Watch on

Kevin Huang | Mandarin

Grade 10 student Kevin Huang talked about why learning Mandarin is important to him, and taught us how to say "peacock".

Kevin | My Language
WRDSB

Watch on

Dhairya Shah | Gujarati

Learn how to say "I love my language" in Gujarati with Dhairya, a Grade 7 student at Groh Public School.

Dhairya | My Language
WRDSB

Jacqueline Wong | Mandarin

Meet Jacqueline, a Grade 11 student at the school at Laurel Heights Secondary School (LHSS), who taught us how to say "Thank you" in Mandarin.

Watch on

Jacqueline | My Language
WRDSB

Watch on



Black Brilliance Shines Bright at Annual Student Conference



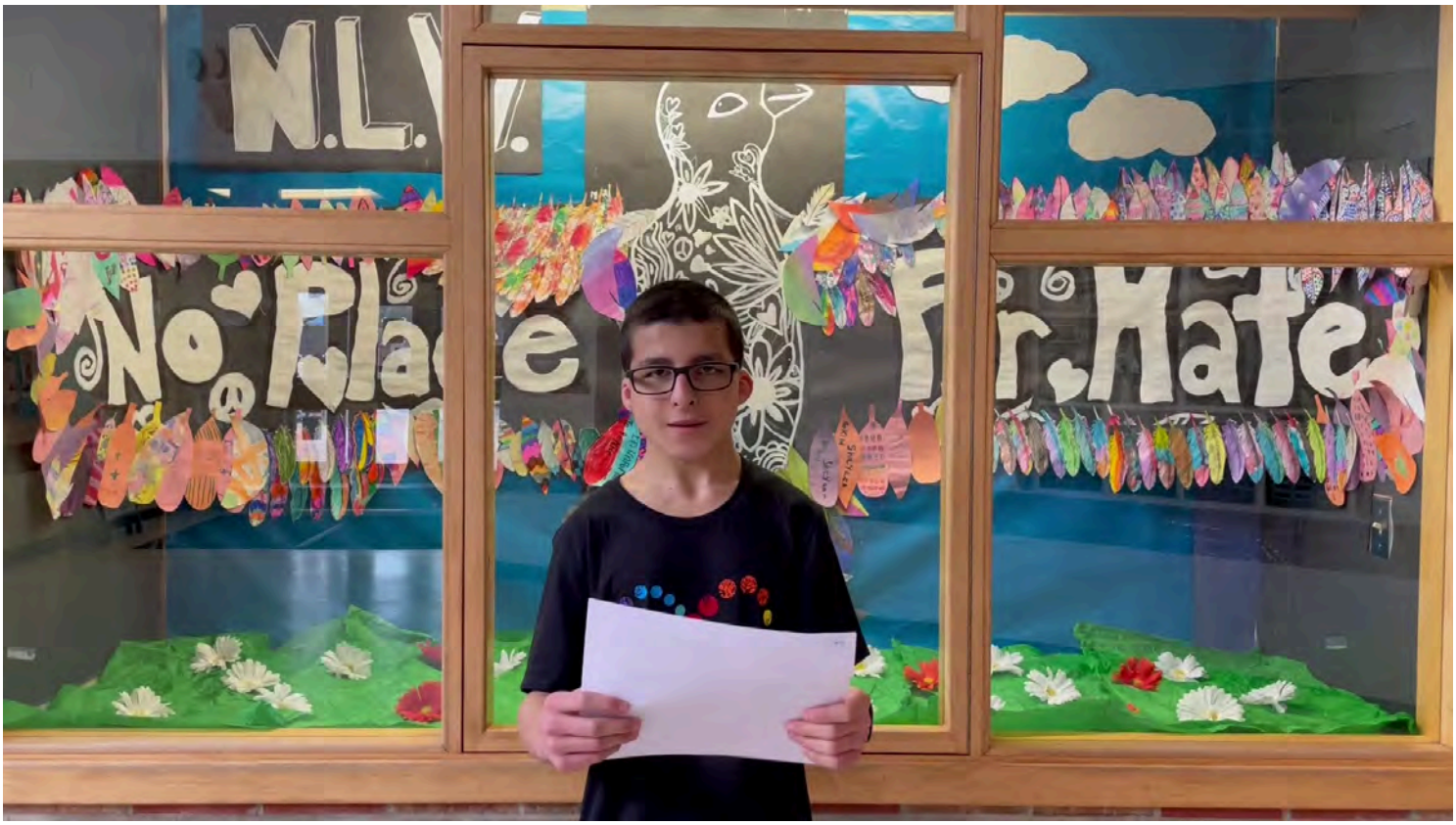
Students Building a Dream for their Future Careers

Educating Students, Together with Our Partners

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Myths and Facts About Autism



The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) is guided by the voices of those we serve: students. Each learner is supported and encouraged to share their thoughts and ideas, with the aim of building a stronger, more effective public education system for all in Waterloo Region. Their well-being is a central facet of this ongoing conversation with students, as we know that a student whose wellness is supported is one who can achieve to their fullest potential in the classroom.

In April 2022, Quinn Plummer, a Grade 8 student at Northlake Woods Public School and disability advocate, felt inspired to help promote acceptance and created a video message to share his personal thoughts on the myths and facts about autism for Autism Acceptance Month. Plummer's video helped students, staff and adults across Waterloo Region to be better informed about autism, ultimately helping everyone to do better.

Watch on



Students Eager to Spread Kindness at Groh PS



Gaining an Appreciation for the Vastness of the Universe at Space Camp



Opportunities Abound in Co-Operative Education

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Opportunities Abound in Co-Operative Education



In the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), secondary students have the opportunity to gain tangible knowledge and experience in their chosen field through a range of co-operative education placements. Available both during the school year and over the summer break, these innovative experiential learning opportunities offer students the chance to work in a range of different fields, like child care, law, computer programming and the trades.

These placements are thanks to the many diverse partnerships between the WRDSB and local businesses and employers. They use these placements as a way to build relationships with potential future employees to support the ongoing strength of their industry, and success of their businesses.

Learn more about what WRDSB students experience and the skills they gain during their time in co-operative education below.



Woodworking Co-Op Offers the Tangible Benefits of Experiential Learning

“There's nothing like sitting on the chair you’ve built.”

Casey Herfuth likes a good challenge and loves working with hands. So, when the Grade 11 student at Preston High School (PHS) was offered a co-op placement at Steel and Timber Designs in Cambridge, he jumped at the opportunity.

He earned high school credits, while gaining practical skills and experience. When we spoke to him, Casey was building a maple table-top straight from freshly-harvested slabs of timber.

Sean White, the owner of Steel and Timber Designs, is a nuclear engineer by training but has long had a passion for woodworking. The joy and satisfaction he gets from the trade is something he wants to instill in others. He knows that to do so, he and other craftsmen will need to invest in the future generation.

“We’re having a hard time finding qualified woodworkers. It is a bit specialized, but there’s such a demand for this type of work that we’re willing to train people who, like Casey, know the basics of the craft,” said Sean. “That’s why I wanted to give him the chance to do things beyond what he would likely be able to do in shop class.”

Read more: Woodworking Co-Op Offers the Tangible Benefits of Experiential Learning



Finding Confidence in Summer Co-Op

“It’s something I’ll be able to take with me whatever I end up doing.”

Co-operative Education is often associated with hands-on learning experiences that can be applied to a specific job or trade. But, co-op placements also provide students with opportunities to develop the soft skills that lead to personal growth and development, and which are in demand in today’s rapidly changing workplaces.

One of those intangibles, poise, is instantly recognizable in Jamie Zhang, a Grade 12 student at Waterloo Collegiate Institute (WCI). She credits much of that to her time as an Air Cadet.

“I was always a bit of a shy kid, but being part of the cadet program has helped me come out of my shell as I became more and more confident in who I am and what I can do.”

This past summer, Jamie had a summer co-op placement in the Canadian Cadet Organization run by the Department of National Defence, where she earned the rank of flight sergeant.

Jamie’s Commanding Officer, Captain Douglas Gibbons, is the officer in charge of the Cadet Activity Program in Kitchener. Gibbons is also a child and youth worker and a National Coaches Certification Program (NCCP) coach. He is passionate about developing the potential in young people.

“One of the pillars of the Cadet Program is the advancement of citizenship and leadership,” Gibbons said. “Jamie has so much potential and it’s great to see her grow and develop her talents and abilities in those areas.”

Read more: Finding Confidence in Summer Co-Op



Renovating Houses and Building New Skills for a Future Career

“I’m learning about the business, working with all sorts of tools, getting some work experience and earning credits.”

Summertime – for most high school students, it’s time for a break from the books, for trips to the beach or hanging out with friends. But for some, summer means unique opportunities to get hands-on training as they test drive a possible career.

The WRDSB Summer Co-op Program gives students a four week placement at a local business or organisation. Besides the hands-on, practical experience of spending time at a workplace, students earn credits towards their diploma.

Josh Savory is in his last year at Huron Heights Secondary School (HHSS). In summer 2022, he worked with Kent McNaughton of Benchmark Renovations restoring a house in downtown Kitchener.

“I’ve been doing all sorts of things,” said Josh. “Everything from flooring, painting, drywall, and hanging cabinets.”

“The Board has been so helpful in working with employers to get co-op placements set up,” said McNaughton. “They provided Josh with the steel-toed safety boots needed for the job site and are helping him apply for two different $1,000 bursaries offered to co-op students who are OYAP participants.”

Read more: Renovating Houses and Building New Skills for a Future Career



Co-op Placement an Investment in Students' Futures

"I'm learning about the value of presenting yourself professionally and understanding the dynamics of an office setting. It's stuff I think you can only learn when you're in an actual workplace."

Saniya Sohal has a pretty good idea about what she wants for her future, and how challenging her path will be.

"I'm hoping to get into a top-end business program at university and from there, go to law school," the Grade 12 student from Laurel Heights Secondary School (LHSS) said in summer 2022. "Both of those are pretty competitive programs."

Saniya knows that applications to programs like this are based on more than just grades. To gain additional experiences and strengthen her application, Saniya is enrolled in the Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) Business program. The SHSM program offers students a bundle of specialized courses in business combined with experiential learning opportunities in the field.

As part of the program, Saniya completed a summer co-op placement at Davenport Realty in Kitchener. A lot of what she did would be considered marketing – looking for leads, keeping an eye on trends in the real estate market, using industry-specific tools and seeing what other realtors are doing.

Tammy Nolan is a broker at Davenport Realty and supervised Saniya's placement.

"I think the [summer co-op] is such a great program," she said. "Saniya is getting insight into the life of a realtor, how real estate works, financial, mortgage understanding, marketing, how businesses find customers and how to grow a database of customers. These are skills that she will be able to apply to whatever industry she ends up in."

Read more: Co-op Placement an Investment in Students' Futures

Co-operative Education in the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB)

Co-operative Education placements give students a hands-on way to explore careers in fields as diverse as child care, law, computer programming and the trades. Students, parents and caregivers can learn about these opportunities by speaking with the Guidance Counsellor at your high school.

Pathways to Success

Visit the Pathways to Success website for information on:

- Co-operative Education
- Dual Credit
- Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP)
- Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM)

Employers

If you're someone who wants to help a student explore a career in your field, contact:
Kim Keena, Experiential and Co-operative Education Lead
Waterloo Region District School Board
kim_keena@wrdsb.ca
519-570-0003 (extension 4443)



Partnership Creating Microforests Across Waterloo Region



Reduced Child Care Costs a Benefit For All in the WRDSB



Elevating Accessibility in the WRDSB



Black Brilliance Shines Bright at Annual Student Conference



Students Building a Dream for their Future Careers

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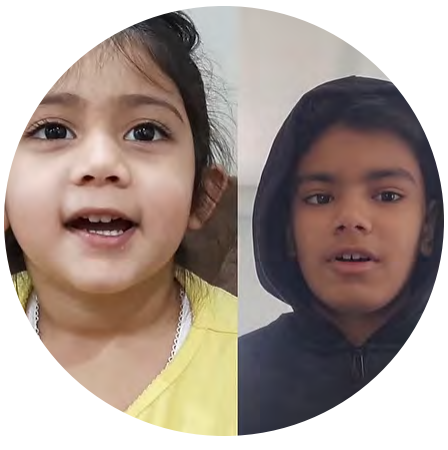
Elevating Accessibility in the WRDSB



Celebrating Sikh Heritage Month in April 2022



Asian Affinity Group Marks Asian Heritage Month



My Language - In the Words of Students



Bringing Innovation to Secondary Students Across the WRDSB



Teacher Captures Student Portraits 10 Years Apart



Myths and Facts About Autism



The Students We Serve



Finding Purpose in Eliminating Discrimination



Showcasing Black Brilliance in the WRDSB



Students Eager to Spread Kindness at Groh PS



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Opportunities Abound in Co-Operative Education



Sparking a Passion for Welding at Cameron Heights



More WRDSB Students Supported in Reaching Graduation and Beyond



Democratizing Healthcare and Testing with Skills Learned in the WRDSB



[Gaming Brings Remote Learning Students Together]



[Students Get Charged Up For Electric Vehicle Challenge]

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Partnership Creating Microforests Across Waterloo Region



Temperatures hovered near zero, and frost covered the ground on a cold Saturday morning in October 2022, but none of this deterred the group of volunteers and students who assembled at Centennial Public School in Cambridge to plant a new microforest.



This is just one of six new microforests planted in 2022, five of which were at Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) schools. In addition to Centennial PS, this included:

- Lincoln Heights Public School
- Parkway Public School
- Sandowne Public School
- Wilson Avenue Public School

The Microforest Planting Project, led by Sustainable Waterloo Region (SWR), is a unique partnership that includes the WRDSB, Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA), and local businesses whose employees volunteer to help plant the microforests. Together, these organizations are creating new resources for students and communities, while working to fight climate change.

Emma Fox is the community engagement manager with SWR, and got the group warmed up with some stretches before their shovels hit the dirt.



In just under three hours, the group of volunteers had all of the trees and shrubs planted, and Fox reflected on what they had accomplished. The group planted around 100 trees in what is called a microforest. This is a dense area of trees and shrubs that's naturalized.

Microforests, with trees and shrubs planted together in close proximity, are more effective than having the same number of trees planted across a larger area, Fox explained. This innovative approach is particularly beneficial in urban environments as it provides enhanced ecological, climate, and human benefits.



In support of this, these microforests are allowed to grow free, with as little human interference as possible. This includes not mowing around the forest to allow the grasses to grow, fostering even more biodiversity.

Beyond the environmental benefits, microforests offer numerous advantages for the students who attend the schools where they are planted. They offer additional shade in the schoolyard, and perhaps even more importantly, additional outdoor educational opportunities as they feature a variety of fauna and flora to study.

Learning outdoors through observation, exploration and play - opportunities for which are available in a microforest - supports student well-being. Benefits go beyond wellness alone, with a direct connection between academic achievement and student well-being.

The Microforest Planting Project led by SWR isn't accomplished by any one group alone. Fox shared that it takes many different organizations working together to achieve the shared objective of improving the environment and tackling climate change in Waterloo Region.

To make a microforest a reality, they need land, trees and volunteers. The WRDSB has been a central partner in providing land and stewardship for the planted microforests, to support their ongoing growth. The Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) provides the native species trees and shrubs that are planted at each site, and offers guidance on how they should be planted.

"The Microforest initiative demonstrates the impact that collaborative partnerships can have in our watershed. Connecting children with nature through tree planting in their own schoolyards helps foster a legacy for many future generations," said Cam Linwood, supervisor of strategic communications for the GRCA. "The Grand River Conservation Authority was happy to supply trees, purchased by Sustainable WR, and support planting efforts for this project."



Volunteers to do the planting are the final piece. They are found by partnering with local companies, who recruit employees to volunteer for a Saturday morning outdoors, enjoying nature and planting a microforest.

“A lot of companies love it. It’s a way to sponsor a site, tackle some sustainability initiatives, as well as bring out employees for an employee engagement day,” said Fox. “It’s a win-win for everyone involved.”



The microforest at Centennial PS was planted thanks to the support of volunteers from GrandBridge Energy. Allison Cann is the manager of customer communications at GrandBridge and was on hand with her colleagues at the school. She explained what brought their team back for another year of planting microforests at WRDSB schools.

“GrandBridge Energy has been a partner of Sustainable Waterloo Region for many years,” said Cann. “Our employees love coming out and are committed to the environment and making our community a more healthy and beautiful place.”



GrandBridge employees weren’t alone though, as they were joined by students from the neighbourhood, and some from further afield. Aiden Walker is a student at Glenview Park Secondary School (GPSS), and was digging in to collect community involvement hours towards his graduation requirement.

“This is one of the more interactive volunteer opportunities,” said Walker. “I think it’s more enjoyable.”

For Walker, it’s important that this work helps to support the environment by creating more trees to sequester carbon in our atmosphere.

“I think everyone needs to play their part in fighting climate change,” he said.

Meghan Reis is the principal at Centennial PS, and was on hand for the planting. For her, it’s emblematic of the power of community collaboration to support student learning.

“This is one of the reasons I became a principal. Connecting community and students and parents,” said Reis. “It just demonstrates the greatness of our community, and how much support and love they have for our school and the kids in it.”

As the morning came to a close, Fox reflected on the broader impact of the microforesting project across Waterloo Region. Once the microforests mature, they’ll improve air quality, reduce temperatures in urban areas and provide shade for those who live and learn near them.

“It makes for a healthier environment in general,” said Fox. “We’re educating, and we’re creating a better physical environment, we’re improving our ecosystems. It’ll make our region more green and move us towards where we need to be.”



Partnership Creating Microforests Across Waterloo Region



Reduced Child Care Costs a Benefit For All in the WRDSB



Elevating Accessibility in the WRDSB

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Reduced Child Care Costs a Benefit For All in the WRDSB



As soon as the Canada-Wide Early Learning & Child Care (CWELCC) agreement was signed in March 2022, the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) began work on bringing savings to the families we serve, explained Melissa Hilton, Extended Day Program Manager for the WRDSB.

"We were committed to using the funding plan and making sure that we could offer reduced rates for families with children five-years-old or younger," said Hilton.

The Extended Day Program team jumped into action, working to understand the necessary steps to license the WRDSB programs so that they would qualify for the reduced rate under the CWELCC agreement.

"Since March 2022, my team has been working closely with the Ministry of Education's Child Care Licensing Branch to undergo the process of licensing WRDSB programs," said Hilton.

Hilton especially credits the Designated Early Childhood Educators (DECE) for their partnership and collaboration throughout the licensing process. It entailed new training and additional requirements for these educators, including a reduced number of students for each educator. Now, there will be no more than 13 students for every DECE, and maximum group sizes of 26.

Staff coordinated walkthroughs for Region of Waterloo Public Health at all 69 of the WRDSB-operated facilities over the summer months in 2022 and the configuration of the billing system to allow for phased reductions in costs for families. This means that families with children five-years-old or younger enjoyed reduced rates on their first bill in September 2022.

Barb Cardow is the director of Children's Services at the Region of Waterloo and supported the WRDSB throughout the licensing process.

"We were so pleased that the WRDSB has been successful in licensing their before and after school programs across the community we serve," said Cardow. "There is no doubt that families throughout Waterloo Region will benefit immensely from more affordable and accessible child care."

Hilton shared her gratitude for the staff in Human Resources, Facility and Financial Services for their collaboration and support throughout the process.

"A huge thank you to our partners and colleagues throughout the WRDSB and Waterloo Region," said Hilton.

In August 2022, the team heard the news that all 69 programs were successfully licensed, making the WRDSB a trailblazer in this effort to offer licensed child care programs. It also makes the WRDSB the largest licensed provider of child care in Waterloo Region - just one more example of the culture of innovation that permeates the school board.

"We were ecstatic," said Hilton. "We're one of the first school boards to become a licensed child care provider, and we're really paving the way."

From September to December 2022, rates were reduced by 25%. From January to June 2023, families will see a further reduction in rates and by 2025, they will reach an average of $10 a day. Hilton explained the impact that these reduced rates will have for families can already be seen in increased enrolment.

"As a school board we have worked hard to make the program accessible for all families. Now with CWELCC funding the program is becoming more affordable for families," said Hilton. "It really makes a big difference for families who need child care."

Providing more affordable and accessible child care helps to provide the conditions for all students to improve their academic achievement and well-being, as we know these two factors are tied together. By focusing on supporting those who are most in need by providing more equitable access to child care, all of the students and families we serve benefit.

Beyond lower rates, families continue to choose WRDSB Extended Day Programs for a variety of reasons, Hilton explained. With programs available at every WRDSB elementary school, it's accessible to families throughout Waterloo Region. No waiting list means that care is more readily available.

"We don't have any limited spaces, we hire the staff that we need to support the programs based on enrollment," said Hilton.

For Hilton, the biggest benefit of the child care offerings available from the WRDSB is the uninterrupted day that students experience.

"Our programs offer a seamless day for children," said Hilton. "They're in a familiar environment, they're in their school, they are with educators who they know from the school day and don't have to transition to another program or location after school."

Register for WRDSB Extended Day Programs

Visit the Extended Day Programs website for more information about programs offered for students in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 6.

The Students We Serve

Finding Purpose in Eliminating Discrimination

Showcasing Black Brilliance in the WRDSB

Showcasing Black Brilliance in the WRDSB



In April 2022, Black students, staff and community members from across the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) came together to highlight student voice and Black Brilliance at the Black Artist-in-Residence Showcase at Eastwood Collegiate Institute (ECI). This event was just one part of the innovative Black Artist-in-Residence program in the WRDSB, led by Antonio Michael Downing, the first WRDSB Artist-in-Residence.



"I'm looking forward to some music, some poetry and some Black joy," said Teneile Warren, Equity and Inclusion officer, as they kicked off the event, to cheers from the crowd.

The audience was wowed by performances from students Charis and Zoe, staff members Rufus John and Teneile Warren and of course, Antonio Michael Downing.



Rufus John, a Child and Youth Worker in the WRDSB, started off the event by sharing his personal experience as a new member of the Kitchener community, and feeling like an outsider. He spoke about how music became a way of exploring his emotions, and of focusing his efforts on making a positive impact. He encouraged all of the students in the audience to think about the influence they have, and how they can use their voices to make positive changes locally, and globally. John explained it all starts by getting up and sharing your voice.

"I'm mindful of the power that we, as artists, have when we're on this stage," said John. "If you're going to stand up here and talk, you'd better have something to say."

Downing was next to take the stage, and shared with the audience how it felt to be back, as a WRDSB grad himself.



“I’m honoured to be the first Black Artist-in-Residence,” he said. “To be real, it felt like I was walking in my own footsteps.”

Downing talked about what it was like to provide Black students with a mentor who looked like them, and who shared many of their lived experiences.

“For some of the folks in the [Black Artist-in-Residence] program, I was going to be the only sort of Black leader, teacher-type figure that they have in their entire school career,” said Downing. “Not all schools in the region are like that, but mine certainly was when I was coming up.”

As he read from his book, Saga Boy, specifically a chapter that focused on his time at Glenview Park Secondary School in Cambridge, he found himself encountering waves of feelings.

“What I wasn’t ready for was how emotional I got,” said Downing. “I’m getting real emotional.”



As he finished performing his hit song Parachute, and a rendition of Billie Holiday’s Black Is the Color of My True Love's Hair, he paused. He wanted to recognize the students in the Black Artist-in-Residence program, and called for a round of applause to thank them for what they all brought to the experience.

“I think I learned just as much from the folks in the program, as I taught them, to be real with you,” said Downing. “A big thank you for what you gave to me.”

Director of Education jeewan chanicka was in the crowd and took a moment to share his thanks with Downing.

“Thank you for coming home,” said chanicka.

Zoe from Glenview Park Secondary School and Charis from Bluevale Collegiate Institute were both part of the Black Artist-in-Residence program, and were next to take the stage. Zoe performed a spoken word piece and Charis sang a rendition of Billie Holiday’s Strange Fruit, both garnering joyous cheers from the crowd.



Warren added to the crowd’s elation with a poem about their identity, and their roots in Jamaica entitled The Black That I Am.

As the afternoon came to a close, the audience and performers came together to enjoy food from local Black businesses: Big Jerk Smokehouse and CE Food Experience & the Bakery. Warren and Downing came together with Angel Hammoud, a consultant in the WRDSB’s Equity & Inclusion Branch and organizer of the event to reflect on how things went. Warren shared how tangible the joy and excitement felt in the auditorium.

“You see it, you can feel it. There was an energy in the space. At one point, when Antonio was reading from Saga Boy, I saw a bunch of students start to lean forward, and lean into his words. That’s what you want.”

The Black Artist-in-Residence program focuses on supporting Black-identifying students from across the WRDSB, but it goes further than that. Enriching the experiences of students from marginalized communities helps to support our commitment to

excellence for all the students we serve.

Hammoud shared that although this event was the culmination of the Black Artist-in-Residence program, it only marks the beginning of the ongoing Black Brilliance work in the WRDSB.

“There was a lot of palpable, Black joy today. That was just beautiful to see,” said Hammoud. “It certainly feels like the start of something.”



Downing, too, shared the power of the experience.

“You could feel the joy, you could feel the shared experience when Rufus was talking and singing, you could feel the joy, but also the shared struggle that everyone was sharing in the room and that is very moving,” said Downing.

As they looked towards the future, and what the success of the Black Artist-in-Residence program meant, Downing talked about what it was like to be a Black mentor for Black students – something he never had at school.

“I think that, in and of itself, represents a change and a shift in the right direction. My mentor saved me, but I never had any that looked like me, or who could relate to that experience.”

Downing’s experience demonstrates something that educators in the WRDSB have long known: a student’s academic success is tied directly to their well-being. By providing mental health and well-being supports, like a caring mentor or coach, all students are that much closer to being able to reach their fullest potential.



For Warren, it was the ideal way to get back to experiencing art and music.

“It was perfect. It was a perfect return to in-person, and we just look forward to more, big in-person events that celebrate the students and give them space to just be joyous,” they said. “It was just, kinetic.”



The Students We Serve



Finding Purpose in Eliminating Discrimination



Showcasing Black Brilliance

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Sparking a Passion for Welding at Cameron Heights



Soveigh Brasseur's passion for welding began with a spark in Shaun Chandler's welding shop and classroom at Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute (CHCI) in Kitchener. Brasseur is now a student at Conestoga College and had the chance to return to her old classroom to give back in early 2022.

The WRDSB Podcast
Making Connections to Future Careers with Welding

"It started here, at this school. I had a lot of experience in Chandler's two welding classes that I took here," said Brasseur. "This is something that I want to do for the rest of my life."

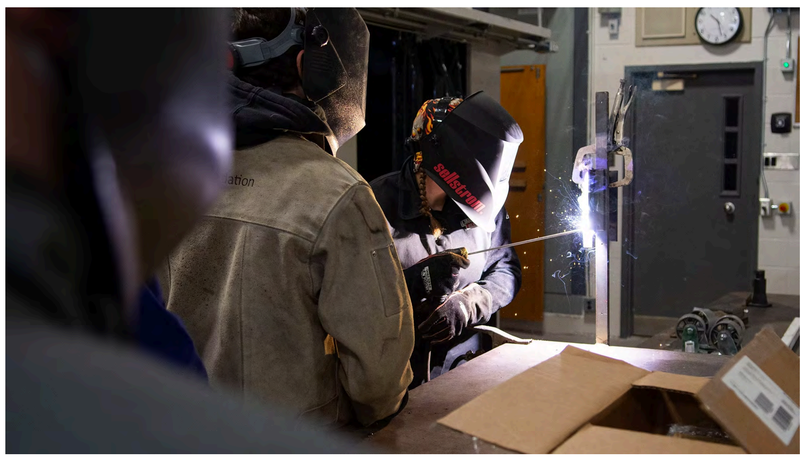
Along with Jameson Payton, also a Conestoga student and CHCI graduate, and their professor Josh Hyde, they offered a demonstration of some advanced welding techniques and brought a donation of welding supplies and equipment on behalf of the Canadian Welding Bureau (CWB) Association Conestoga College Student Chapter in partnership with The CWB Foundation.



The donation from the CWB Association was in recognition of the Ministry of Education's approval of a Manufacturing Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program at CHCI. Becky Zettl, the SHSM lead for the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), explained how SHSM programs offer enhanced experiences and experiential learning opportunities for students.

Secondary schools throughout the WRDSB offer a range of SHSM programs, from agriculture to information and communication technology, to help prepare students for the next steps in their learning and career journey. It's just one of the many ways that WRDSB students are supported in being successful on the path to graduation and beyond. Zettl explained that this designation helps to unlock additional provincial funding, offering enhanced opportunities for students.

"The funding that comes with SHSM is going to allow this teacher and the students in this program to do a lot more experiential learning," said Zettl. "Specialist High Skills Major is designed to expose students to experiences that help them understand their options in that potential pathway."



Asher McDougall, a Grade 11 student at CHCI, is one of those students exploring their options. Previously in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, he explained that the skills he learns in the welding shop help him feel successful, and prepare for the future.

"I was in the IB program up until this semester, and I took these [welding] courses," said McDougall. "I really enjoy being in the welding shop and actually seeing improvement, because that was one thing that lacked in my other courses. You're getting these test marks, but where does it really fit into what you're going to do later in your life?"

McDougall's experience is emblematic of students across the WRDSB, who take the reins of their education as they follow their passion for learning towards a rewarding career pathway. McDougall had the opportunity to reach beyond the IB program to try his hand at welding, opening up new options for his future, using his voice to direct his learning journey.

While McDougall is still working to decide on his post-secondary pathway, he is leaning towards robotics, with a welding focus, at Conestoga College. This would allow him to combine his interests in technology and computers, with his growing skills. He's grateful to have had the opportunity to get his start at school.

"When I was a kid I never thought that I'd be in a welding shop, combining metal together. Thinking back on it, it's really cool to be able to do this," said McDougall.



For Shaun Chandler, the welding teacher at CHCI, this is exactly the kind of wonder and passion he aims to inspire in students. With a history as a professional welder-fitter before becoming a teacher, Chandler always had an interest in helping those who were new to manufacturing and welding.

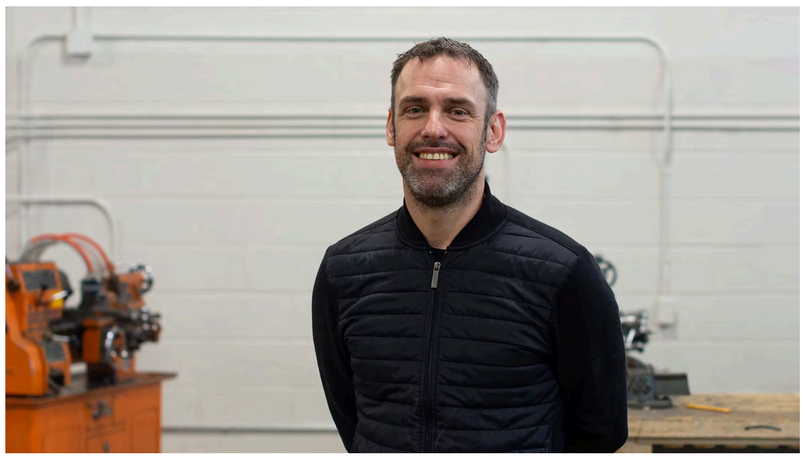
“I always wanted to share my experiences as a tradesperson,” said Chandler. “It’s a great trade. It’s a lot of fun and I think the kids get to see that early on - that’s fantastic.”

The chance to provide his students with an experiential learning opportunity, and to reconnect with former students was too good to pass up. Chandler’s innovative approach

“Soveigh and Jameson were students that I have great memories of. They’re both really hard working students,” said Chandler. “It feels great to see them come back, and to hear how important this was to them when they were here.”

The students that take his classes are on a variety of pathways, he explained. Some see the skill of welding as integral to their planned career, and for others, it’s a skill they want to have as a hobby. Either way, for anyone who is interested in taking one of Chandler’s courses, he explains there is no downside.

“You can go anywhere with this,” said Chandler. “This is a stepping stone to move you somewhere else.”



Payton knows this well. He got his start with welding in the same classroom at CHCI as Brasseur. Thinking back, the opportunities he had by taking this welding class helped him decide on his post-secondary pathway.

“Getting out there, getting all that different experience really helped with making that decision,” said Payton.

While coming back to his former high school offered feelings of nostalgia, it was really the chance to inspire a passion for welding in other students that he enjoyed.

“It’s a good feeling being able to come back and put that spark into people’s eyes, the same spark that I had back when I was here,” said Payton.



As the SHSM programs build for the future, Zettl explained how new, innovative technologies are playing a larger supportive role, helping students to be prepared for the next step on their pathway, whether it’s the workplace, post-secondary education, or an apprenticeship.

“We’ve got a platform where students can come in and do micro-credentials and earn these certificates and certifications asynchronously, and that’s something unique to our school board,” said Zettl.

Employing online platforms for this purpose makes it easier than ever before for students to ensure they have the skills and certifications necessary to hit the ground running in their chosen next steps after high school.

For any students or families who are considering an SHSM program, Zettl encourages you to think about how much of a positive change it could have.

“It allows students to explore their future and therefore construct an identity that makes them feel special and engaged. I consider SHSM a transformational program.”

Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM) in the WRDSB

The Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program offers students in Grades 11 and 12 the opportunity to explore a specific career area that interests you while you earn your high school diploma. No matter what education you plan to pursue after high school - apprenticeship, college, university or workplace training - the SHSM program can help you focus your future career.

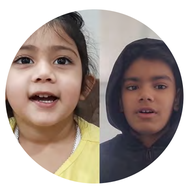
Visit the Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM) website.



Celebrating Sikh Heritage Month in April 2022



Asian Affinity Group Marks Asian Heritage Month



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Students Building a Dream for their Future Careers



Students, parents and caregivers packed the Bingemans Conference Centre in November 2022 for the first in-person Build a Dream Career Discovery Expo in Waterloo Region since before the pandemic.

Nour Hachem-Fawaz is the president and founder of Build a Dream, which aims to promote opportunities for women and those who identify as women in a number of fields:

- Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (STEM)
- Skilled Trades
- Emergency Response
- Entrepreneurship
- Leadership

"It's really exciting" to be back in-person, explained Hachem-Fawaz. Attendees had the chance to meet with over 40 exhibitors, showcasing career opportunities and pathways ranging from the local carpenters' union to Region of Waterloo Paramedics.



"They get a chance to network with industry leaders and learn more about these different pathways that exist for them," said Hachem-Fawaz.

For Nour, the best part is being able to see the light-bulb moments for students as they uncover a career pathway that ignites their passion for learning.

"One of the things that I love the most about being here is witnessing their body language, their excitement change in front of our eyes, because they've just been exposed to a whole new world," said Hachem-Fawaz. "That power can never be undone."

She credits the joint partnership between the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), Waterloo Catholic District School Board (WCDSB), Upper-Grand District School Board (UGDSB) and Wellington Catholic District School Board (WCDSB) for making the career expo possible. It provides students in these boards with the unique opportunity to connect directly with professionals and employers while learning more about the pathways available to them.

"It takes school board partnerships to make these events happen," said Hachem-Fawaz. "Without them, we wouldn't be able to tap into the young minds and have parents at the table as they make these really important life decisions."



Paige Wassing is in her fifth year at Eastwood Collegiate Institute (ECI), and came to the career expo with a specific future job in mind.

"I'm looking to be an electrician, so my teacher recommended this event for me. I was thinking I could talk to people in the trades, and see what it's like," said Wassing.

Her interest in becoming an electrician was first sparked by her experiences in the classroom.

"I took a construction technology class for Grade 11 and 12, and we actually built a life-sized frame with wiring and I got to turn a lightbulb on and charge my phone," said Wassing. "That was pretty awesome, so that's what intrigued me."

Whether you've got some idea or no idea what you want to do in the future, you'll discover something new about the options available to you, she explained.

"I would recommend coming here, because this is really beneficial," said Wassing. "It was great, I learned a lot."

Some students approaching the end of their time in secondary school feel worried about what comes next. A unique opportunity like the career expo can help to alleviate this anxiety by providing them a clearer idea of their career interests. This helps to support student well-being, in turn supporting their success in the classroom.



Ava Carlaw, a Grade 11 student at Waterloo Oxford District Secondary School (WODSS) shared how she felt about having the opportunity to learn more about the career pathways available, and how she can start taking steps for the future now.

“I’m just so happy that this event was available,” said Carlaw. “It made me feel more confident going out after high school, knowing what I can do.”

Apprenticeship and co-operative education stood out for her, as she looks to set herself on a pathway in either the carpentry or welding fields.

“All the vendors that I went to, they all really encouraged co-op,” said Carlaw.

For her, the most interesting part of working in the trades is the ability to be a lifelong learner.

“There’s always room to improve, and that’s what I really like about those career pathways,” said Carlaw.

Nancy Sanchez attended with her daughter, Carlaw, who she explained took the initiative by planning to come out to the career expo. She was struck by how much support is available for students wanting to begin exploring their career options in secondary school, including in the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP).

“Them paying you to go and learn. That surprises me,” said Sanchez. “It’s great that she can start as early as Grade 11.”



Christine Gervais came out to Bingemans’ with two of her daughters, who moved quickly to try out the tools available at the carpenters’ union booth. Gervais saw clear connections to careers that have run in their family.

“My dad’s a carpenter, he had his own construction company,” said Gervais. “To see them hammering in the nails was pretty fun, they both lit up when they were doing that.”

As her daughters begin to make decisions about what classes and programs they’ll take in secondary school, she hopes this helps them understand just how many options are available.

“I hope it opens up some opportunities for them,” said Gervais.



David Pope is the OYAP coordinator for the WRDSB, and helped to coordinate the Build a Dream career expo. He was helping students, parents and caregivers to learn more about the options available to students in secondary school. Specifically, he promotes the option students have to take co-operative education, allowing them to experience a career as early as Grade 11.

“Try a career, before you buy a career,” said Pope. “I always think co-op is the most important course you can take, because you are getting to experience something, before you spend a lot of time and money after graduation.”

For those students who are just starting to get an idea of what they want to do after high school, Pope recommends EdgeFactor - an innovative online platform available to all WRDSB secondary students that provides a closer look at a multitude of potential careers.

“It’s like Netflix for career videos,” said Pope. “There are over 3,000 career videos where they’ve interviewed workers, in different careers about what they like and don’t like, how they got into it and what their day looks like.”



As she reflected on her hope for what students take away from their experience at the career expo, Hachem-Fawaz echoed her desire for all those who attended to understand the sheer number of career options available for women and those who identify as women.

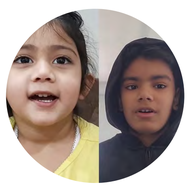
“Just because you don’t think you can, does not mean you should limit yourself from giving it a try,” she said. “That’s something I wish more young women knew.”



Celebrating Sikh Heritage Month in April 2022



Asian Affinity Group Marks Asian Heritage Month



My Language - In the Words of Students

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Students Eager to Spread Kindness at Groh PS



“In a world where you can be anything, be kind.”

This phrase has always been a driving force for Jennifer Haves, a Grade 2 teacher at Groh Public School in Kitchener. It inspires and guides how she aims to build a sense of community in her classrooms, guided by the knowledge that the well-being of the students she serves is directly tied to their academic success.

After seeing social media posts and reading about Kindness Clubs in other elementary schools, she felt inspired to take the message of kindness and help students spread it across the entire Groh PS school community and beyond.

Haves and teachers Emily Darby, Edina Pervanic, Natasha Tsetsekas and Laura Wolfe, put out an open call for students to join the new Kindness Club.

“To be honest, I was expecting 30 or 40 students to show up,” said Haves.

Turns out, students at Groh PS were beyond eager to use their voices to help spread acts and messages of kindness across their school, with close to 200 students showing up for the first meeting.

“To say I was blown away is an understatement,” said Haves. “I just stood in the hallway staring at the massive group in disbelief. I was thrilled to see all those faces and the sheer excitement radiating from them.”

Grade 4 student Hayden said he wanted to join the Kindness Club, “because I want to be better at being kind. Even though I'm already kind, I thought I could do better and I want to make other people feel happy.”

“If someone is feeling down it's always good to make them feel better,” he said. “When they get happy, you feel happy too!”

Haves explained that Hayden wasn’t the only student who was this excited to take part.

“I don’t think [the students] needed a lot of motivation. When given the opportunity, all kids want to be kind and help others,” said Haves.

Now that the Kindness Club has taken off with so much enthusiasm, students are hard at work planning activities to engage the whole school and the surrounding community in spreading kindness. The entire project is guided and led by student voice - ensuring that their work is responsive to the needs of their friends and peers.

Activities include painting and displaying kindness rocks, creating positive and inclusive displays within the school, giving out morning high-fives and staff shout-outs, and making thank-you cards, to name a few.

The efforts of these students will have an impact that reaches well beyond the borders of the schoolyard. And they may even inspire others to start Kindness Clubs at their schools.

Asked if she had any advice for other schools considering starting a Kindness Club, Haves said, “Be prepared for a large turnout and get ready to be amazed!”







Bringing Innovation to Secondary Students Across the WRDSB

Teacher Captures Student Portraits 10 Years Apart

Myths and Facts About Autism

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Students Get Charged Up For Electric Vehicle Challenge



The sounds of cheering nearly drowned out the low purr of electric motors during the Waterloo High School Electric Vehicle (EV) Challenge at the University of Waterloo in May of 2022. The endurance racing event invited secondary students from across Ontario, including Bluevale Collegiate Institute (BCI), Eastwood Collegiate Institute (ECI), Laurel Heights Secondary School (LHSS) and Preston High School (PHS), to compete in electric vehicles of their own design and construction.

Students from BCI defended their title in both the 12 and 24 volt categories, while the team from LHSS took home third in the 24 volt race.

This extraordinary opportunity allows students to put the skills and knowledge learned in the classroom into action as they innovate solutions to complex problems, and prepare for their post-secondary pathways in a world where the green technologies industry is ever-growing.

Emma Jenkins, a Grade 12 member of the BCI team, shared her feelings after the morning race.

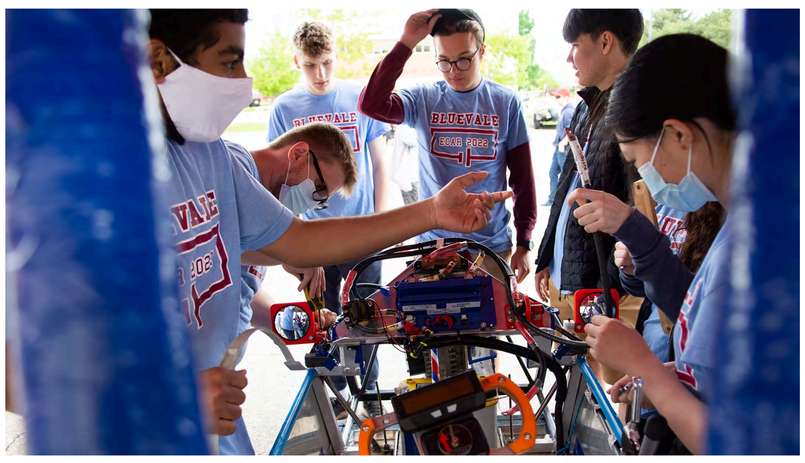
“It’s just been a really great day,” said Jenkins. “I’m really happy with the results. We did really well. Kept up the 10-year record of Bluevale doing great, so I’m really happy.”

It wasn’t all about winning, though, as other students shared.

“We tried hard and we raced well, so I think we’re happy about it,” said Logan Eby, a Grade 12 member of the LHSS team. “It’s not necessarily too much about actually competing with the other schools, it’s mostly building the cars and having fun racing them.”

“We might’ve not won the race, but we got here,” said Dawa Tamang, a Grade 12 member of the ECI team.

Laila Elhossini, also a Grade 12 member of the BCI team, shared her excitement about being back at an event with students from other schools. She felt that their performance was the result of their hard work in the years and months leading up to the event.



“It’s awesome. It’s been so long since we’ve done anything in-person. This is the culmination of all our efforts, so it’s really satisfying,” said Elhossini.

Reflecting on his experience behind the wheel, Kenny Lin, a Grade 12 member of the LHSS team shared what it was like to be at the helm.

“Driving this thing is truly an awesome experience,” said Lin. “I love the sound of the electric engine. I love the rattling noise of the metal, and knowing that the speed and the control is all under your hands.”

“It feels great. I’d rather be doing this than sitting on the couch at home,” agreed Brandyn David, a Grade 11 member of the PHS team.



“The adrenaline from seeing all these magnificent cars and their designs is just wonderful,” said Ryan Persaud, a Grade 10 member of the ECI team.

Peter Teertstra, director of the Sedra Student Design Centre at University of Waterloo (UW) which hosts the race series, shared its origins. Starting with a series of events hosted at a secondary school in Orangeville, in 2012 UW took over the role of host, where the event has remained ever since. Teertstra shared his excitement to return to the in-person race, which had been paused during the pandemic.

“We’re really excited to be back and racing here at Waterloo,” said Teertstra. “It’s almost like a reunion, seeing everybody again.”

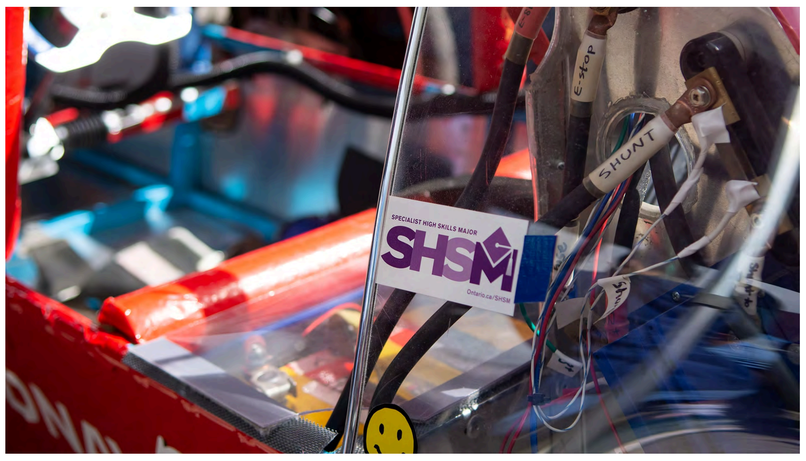


The nature of the challenge, asking teams to start from scratch as they build an electric car that runs on either one or two normal 12 volt car batteries, presents a multitude of learning opportunities for students, Teertstra explained. From collaboration and time management, to more specific skills like fabrication, welding or analyzing data.

“Just working on problems where the answer isn’t really clearly understood,” he said. “There are just so many different lessons that you learn as you go through a project like this.”

The EV Challenge is just one of many unique opportunities that exist for WRDSB students, thanks in large part to the close partnerships that exist between the school board and the post-secondary educational institutions in Waterloo Region.

Jamie Cox is a tech design teacher at BCI, and a staff mentor of their team. He laid out the challenge that faces teams succinctly.



“The idea is to put a battery, or two batteries, in the racecar and to try and go as far as you can on that one charge,” said Cox.

He hopes that the experience will allow students to get a different perspective on green technologies.

“It’s racing…but it’s not racing in terms of going the fastest. It’s, ‘how do I take a finite amount of energy and actually use it in an effective way to go the furthest’,” said Cox.

In between the races, the students are hard at work, making sure the vehicles are in top shape for the harsh racing conditions. The low-slung vehicles are subjected to bumps and vibrations through the course of a race day, and need to be able to take the punishment.

“Maintenance on the cars is really critical,” said Cox. “The cars are just rattled.”

For students like Jenkins and Elhossini, this preparation is their favourite part.

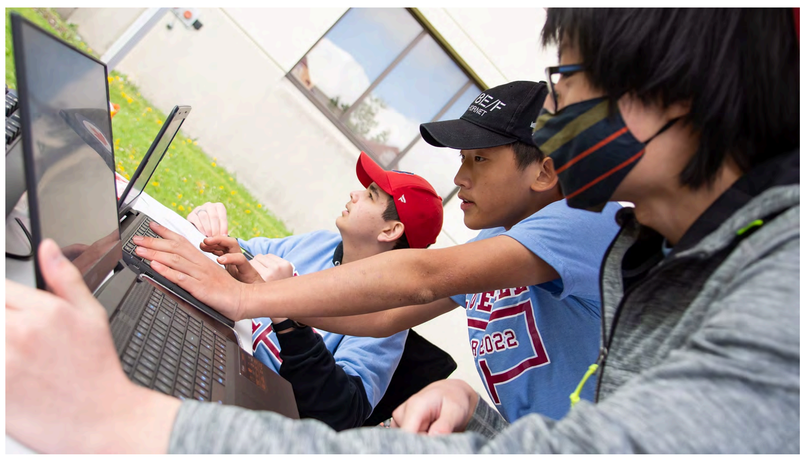


“Working together and getting to work with my hands. I’m always better when I’m doing hands-on stuff, and I find it much more fun than theory,” said Jenkins. “Just being able to work with people and then seeing our efforts actually pay off.”

“Just getting my hands dirty, and being with like-minded people…and making cars. It’s awesome,” echoed Elhossini.

These are some of the benefits of being part of an electric car team, explained John Aguiar, an auto teacher at ECI and staff mentor of their team. From design, to engineering, to fabrication, to marketing and branding, there are an array of skills needed to create a strong team.

“It really incorporates a lot of various talents,” said Aguiar. There are “…a lot of different aspects that other students can get involved with that cater to their interests and skill set "



Students who take part gain confidence in using their voice to help lead the innovation process, and to give their team a leg up on the competition.

Cox shared a recent example of this. Students on the BCI team created software that allows them to track their battery charge to help them achieve optimal performance.

“So we could actually see the battery power in real-time,” said Cox. “That’s a big advantage.”

This is how the students level up their teams year-to-year, explained Paul Brubacher, head of the Technology Department at PHS.

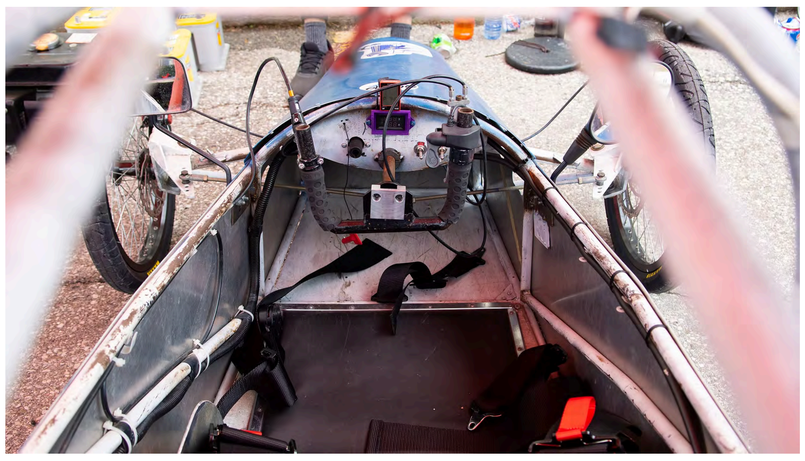
“You try to come back each time with a better, more improved vehicle,” said Brubacher. “It’s a learning process. It's an excellent engineering experience for kids. To have to think, and fabricate.”



The students, too, share how meaningful this experiential learning has been for them. No matter where they are headed after graduation, the skills they’ll take with them will serve them well.

Jenkins, who plans to attend the biomedical engineering program at the University of Guelph, sees the applicability of what she’s learning on the electric car team.

“I’ll use all the skills here, between knowing how electrical circuits work and data for that,” she said.



Elhossini, too, plans to continue using the knowledge she learned as part of the team.

“Learning leadership, communication, organization – it’s been a great help learning all these skills,” said Elhossini. “I recently accepted my offer into mechatronics at UW. So, I hope to continue working on an EV team.”

These skills aren’t just applicable to those students headed to university. Bryan Clausi is a Grade 12 student on the LHSS team, and shared how this learning would help him.

“I’m going to be going to Conestoga next year for power systems engineering…this is right up my alley,” said Clausi.

Though some students will be graduating and moving on to their next challenge, many will be returning next year to take on the EV Challenge again. For them and their staff mentors, the focus now turns to making repairs and improvements.

Justin Shiaman, a Grade 10 member of the PHS team, explained that while this process can present challenges, figuring out how to overcome them creatively is the best part.



“Whenever something breaks or something goes wrong, trying to figure out how to fix it,” said Shiaman. “It kind of makes it fun.”

“Every year, we run into some crazy problem that nobody could have foresaw, and then you start to see the true design process going on where students really have to reach to make this work,” agreed Cox.

For any students or staff who are interested in putting together a team, Teertstra encourages them to reach out for guidance and support. He wants you to know you won’t regret it.

“Take the chance, take the risk, because it is so worth it.”

About the Waterloo EV Challenge
Hosted by Waterloo Engineering, the Waterloo High School Electric Vehicle (EV) Challenge encourages students to design and test their own electric car in an annual endurance competition.

Learn more on the Electric Vehicle Challenge website.



Sparking a Passion for Welding at Cameron Heights



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Teacher Captures Student Portraits 10 Years Apart



Award Winner: This story was recognized at the Canadian Association of Communicators in Education (CACE) BRAVO Awards with a Coup De Coeur Award.

Students grow and change a lot during their time in school, and Conan Stark, a teacher at Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute (CHCI) in Kitchener had the unique opportunity to appreciate just how significant, or how indistinguishable, these changes can be.

In 2012, alongside his students Zaven Titizian and Leigh Sellner, he photographed a class of Grade 2 students at Williamsburg Public School, which happened to be taught by his wife, Melissa Stark. In the 2021-22 school year, he learned that some of those same students were now in his Grade 12 photography class.

"We went there - just for the day - just to teach my students about photojournalism, kind of working on-location photography," Conan told CBC Kitchener-Waterloo.

Melissa remembered this day well. She was excited to have the opportunity to see photographs of her students learning in action.

“I had a Grade 2 class, a sweet little group of kids,” said Melissa. “It was winter, so we were cutting out snowflakes and getting ready to decorate the classroom.”

A decade later, in May 2022, Conan realized many of these same students were now Grade 12 students at CHCI. An innovative idea about the unique opportunity available began to take shape as he connected with each of these students. He could take a series of updated portraits, which could also serve as a surprise for his wife, Melissa.

“The kids all seemed to really enjoy being a part of it,” said Conan. “I knew we had to do something with it.”

Titizian and Sellner both returned to reconnect while the portraits were being taken, too, truly taking things full-circle.



“It was really neat to see my Grade 12 photography students from 2012, 10 years later as adults and to see how well they are doing,” said Conan.

The 2022 portraits help to show how students change in some ways, but stay the same in others.



"The more I looked through the photos, and in talking with the students that were in front of me, I started realizing they had grown a lot, but their core identity was still intact,” Conan said. “The same energy, if you will. A similar smile, a head tilt, a calmness."

Once the photos were compiled, Conan revealed the surprise for Melissa. Through teary eyes, she explained what it was like to see so many of her students again.

“You love these kids and you help them learn and grow and you celebrate with them...and then you send them off and you don’t always see who they become or what path they’ve chosen, and so being able to see them as Grade 12 students, ten years later, was so fulfilling and so emotional,” said Melissa. “Seeing them and knowing that they were happy and safe and doing well, and moving on to wonderful things in their lives, it was just, so, so cool.”

She was especially struck by what confident, talented and grown up people they had all become.

“They look so powerful,” said Melissa.

A few of the students involved told CBC KW what this opportunity to reflect meant for them, and what they took away from it.



"Growing up, was really, really, really scary to me. Every year that I went up a grade I would be so scared of everything, and so anxious all time," Anne-Katherine Le said to CBC KW. "Growing up isn't so scary. Change isn't that bad and change is sometimes for the better. Even though some change is horrible — but you do grow out of it."



Thinking back, Grade 12 student Nardos Felefele sees how much she has learned about herself, and the strength of her voice in the past decade.

"Especially as a woman, and as a woman of colour - I wish that I had of known earlier that standing up for myself would be the most important lesson, and that's how I'm going to get ahead in life: making sure my voice is heard, and not expecting anybody else to do the talking for me," said Felefele.

As Felefele learned and grew during her time in the WRDSB, at every stage she gained confidence and skill in using her voice to help guide her path, and to shape the world around her in positive ways.



For Conan, he hopes that this opportunity helps students see just how much they've learned, grown and evolved as individuals. He knows they'll continue to find success as they bring the same curiosity and excitement to wherever life takes them next.

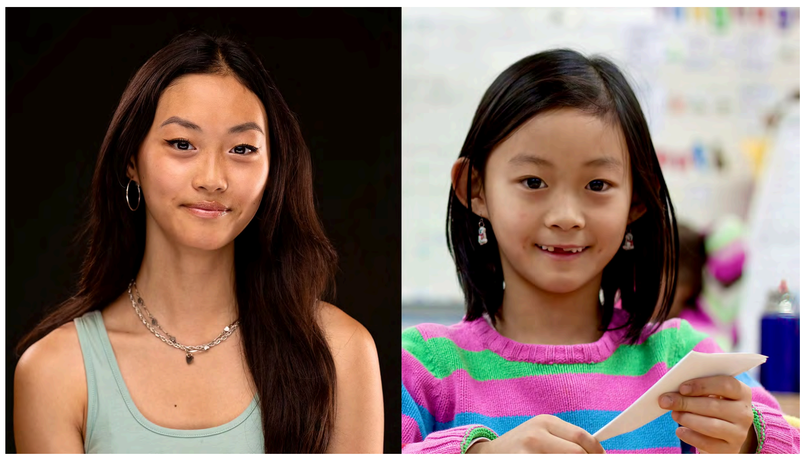
"As a teacher you're not too sure if it connects, but that's what I hope for them: that they just keep having that positivity," said Conan.

The photo series drew a much larger response than just from Melissa and the students, though. Their peers, friends, family, other former educators and more expressed how joyful this series made them feel.

"I wasn't expecting a lot of reaction beyond the students themselves," said Conan.

For Conan and Melissa, this illustrates just how connected we all are in the close-knit community of the WRDSB and in Waterloo Region as a whole.

"Yes, K-W is a big place, but it's a small place too," said Melissa.



Melissa built on this theme of connection, and explained her hope that all students know they remain connected to and cared for by all of those educators who have worked with them on their learning journey in the WRDSB.

"I hope they know that the teachers that taught them along the way care about them," said Melissa. "Just because we have you for a year, doesn't mean we stop caring after that."

Both Melissa and Conan see no end in sight for their connection with these students.

"I hope I see them again in another ten years, and see where they've gone," said Melissa.



The Students We Serve



Finding Purpose in Eliminating Discrimination



Showcasing Black Brilliance in the WRDSB

Waterloo Region District School Board
51 Ardelt Avenue
Kitchener, ON
N2C 2R5

Find us on social media

The Students We Serve



In 2022, the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) student census allowed us to hear the voices of more than 30,000 of the students we serve as we plan how to better support them. This census included innovative and differentiated methods for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 to share their thoughts, experiences and ideas to help shape their own learning experiences.

The results showed us that we serve students from at least 104 ethnic or cultural backgrounds. We also learned a lot more about the varied identities, abilities and lived experiences of students.

We know that when students have their identities celebrated and reflected in their learning environments, they are better able to achieve academically and ultimately, in life. This is because well-being and academic achievement are directly connected. In fact, when this happens, this is how we equip our students to be successful in the world.

Every student deserves the right to bring their gifts, talents, skills and lived experiences to create and transform our world. We reflect the community we serve – these are WRDSB students:

WRDSB Students
WRDSB

Watch on



Sparking a Passion for Welding at Cameron Heights



More WRDSB Students Supported in Reaching Graduation and Beyond



Democratizing Healthcare and Testing with Skills Learned in the WRDSB