



WRDSB is continuing our core work of supporting the academic achievement and well-being of the students we serve, as we reimagine a public education system that truly provides equitable opportunities and outcomes for all.

- jeewan chanicka

Director's Message

Students are at the center of all decision-making for the Board of Trustees and we continue to work together with parents and caregivers as partners in their education to ensure student success.

- Joanne Weston

Chairperson Message



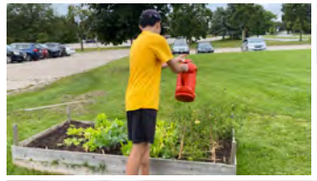


Looking ahead to 2024, we will continue to work as dedicated advocates for all WRDSB students at the Board Table and beyond. Every student the WRDSB serves should have a voice in shaping the future of learning that supports their success.

Abdullah Awan and
Casper Dong

Letter from Student Trustees


#GROHGALA




Terry Fox
Lives Here










THEY
REPRESENT
YOU!
MEET THE STUDENT TRUSTEE CANDIDATES



Stories of success from our Strategic Plan

2023 gave us countless examples of students, staff, families and community members embracing the objectives of the WRDSB Strategic Plan. It's a plan built with the wisdom and knowledge shared by more than 10,000 of those it serves. The results have seen students and families more engaged with their neighbourhood schools, students and staff working together to empower student leadership, and the skills students learn in the classroom making a positive difference in their own communities. Together, we are creating schools where all students are able to reach their full potential on their chosen pathway in learning and life.

Read more about our Strategic Plan.



Centring Students

All students' voices are important
Learn More

Support for student and staff well-being

Students and staff experience positive well-being as part of a caring and inclusive community
Learn More





Equitable opportunities and outcomes

Create opportunities for everyone to succeed
Learn More

Strengthen connections through family and community engagement

Better relationships with families and community partners

Learn More





Increase student learning through engagement

Better relationships with families and community partners

Learn More

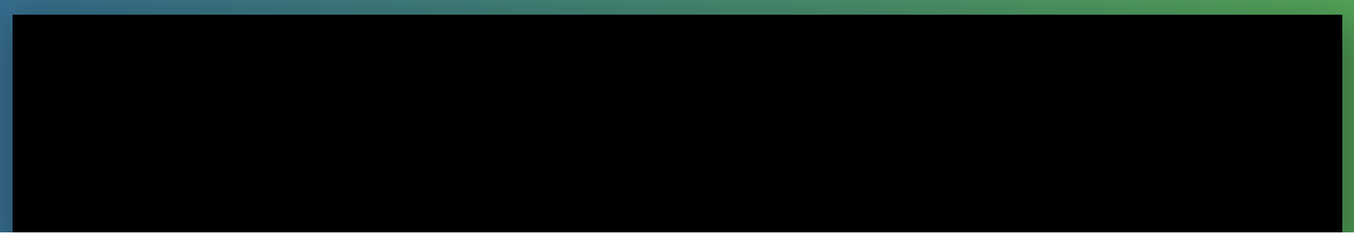
Collaboration and compassion for transformation

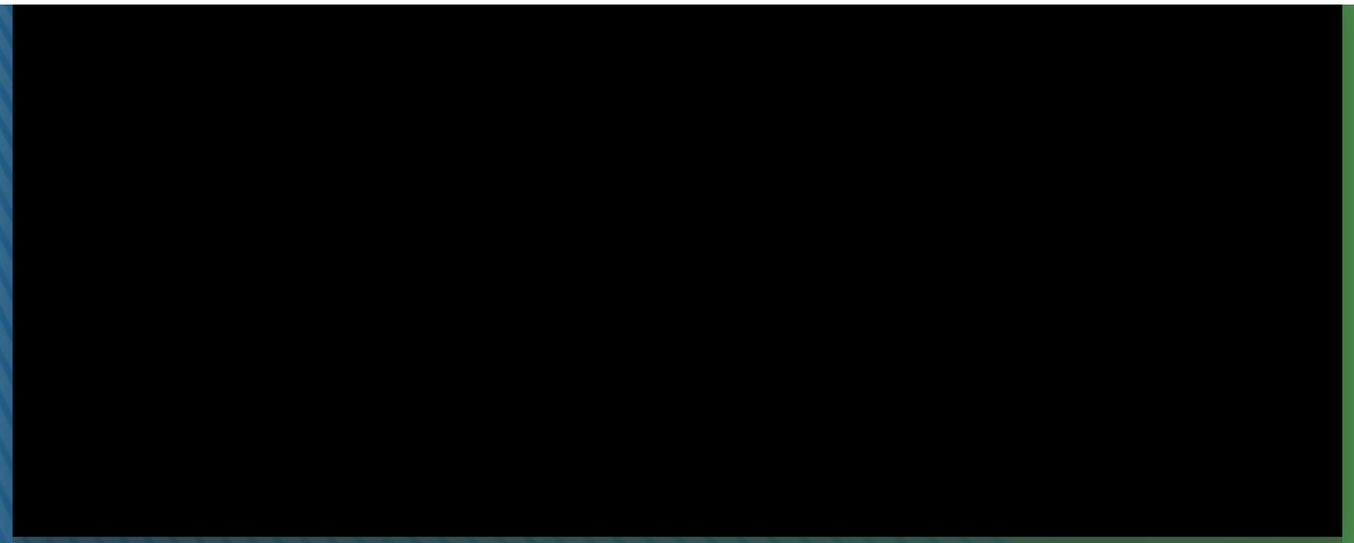
Better relationships with families and community partners

Learn More



Transforming Education





We are transforming education to prepare students for success in the future. When we think about schools and learning, we imagine how reading and math can be part of a new education system. We understand that these subjects are essential for students' learning. But, what if students had more say in how they meet expectations in subjects and curriculum? What if teachers were guides and collaborators in student learning, rather than instructors? At WRDSB, we are committed to Transforming Education.

BOARD IMPROVEMENT AND EQUITY PLAN



In 2023, we saw the results of the first full school year implementation of the Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP). The indicators showed growth in student achievement, particularly in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

The BIEP is one of the ways WRDSB reviews its progress and the outcomes of specific strategies to support student achievement and well-being in alignment with the Strategic Plan.

The four areas of the BIEP are:

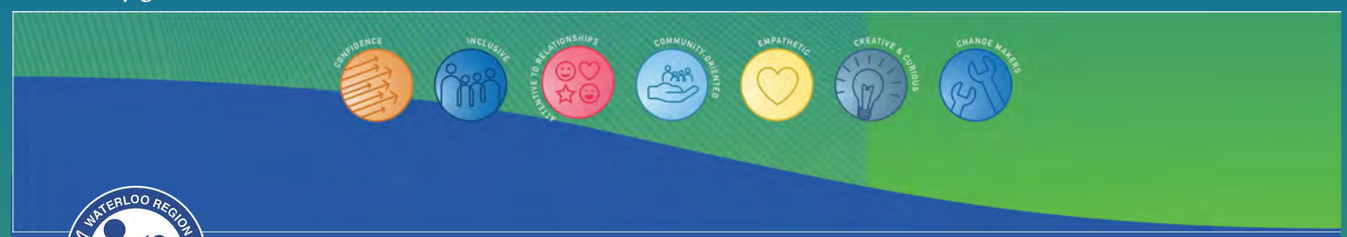
- **Achievement**
- **Sovereignty, human rights and equity**
- **Mental health, well-being and engagement**
- **Pathways and transitions**

Read more about the results of our 2022-2023 Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP).

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:



Waterloo Region District School Board
Kitchener, ON
N2C 2R5

Find us on social

A Message from Director of Education jeewan chanicka

As we prepare to wrap up an incredible 2023, and embark upon a fresh new year of opportunity and learning, I invite you to join me in reflecting on all that we accomplished together this year. The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) Annual Report provides a look at the day-to-day and annual work of students, staff and community members in a shared effort to support the six strategic directions laid out in our Strategic Plan.



To make these goals a reality and to guide our annual work, we created our 2022-23 Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP). Fundamentally, the BIEP understands that every student is unique, and lays out our commitment to providing all students with the resources and support they need to achieve their full potential in the classroom and in life. In October 2023, we shared the impact we've seen so far.

The results of the implementation of the 2022-23 BIEP are encouraging and allow us to better understand the effectiveness of the strategies we've put in place. Most importantly, we are seeing growth in students' academic achievement, especially in the key areas of literacy and numeracy. This is as a direct result of understanding that equity must be foundational to the work we do as a system. We know this progress alone is not enough. We are committed to continued growth in an effort to systematically reach each and every student that we serve.

As we reflect on 2023, the data gives us plenty to be proud of. In fact, it shows that the strategies and plans we're putting in place are having a positive impact on achievement and well-being for the students we serve.

EQAO Results

The 2022-23 EQAO assessment results are a key piece of data in helping us to determine the effectiveness of our strategies, and how we can fine tune our approach to support more students.

Grade 3

For students in Grade 3, WRDSB results were equal to the provincial average in Reading and Writing, and 1% below in Math. Compared to our results in the 2021-22 EQAO assessment, this represents:

- Reading +1%
- Writing +2%
- Math +1%

Grade 6

The results of the Grade 6 assessments were also encouraging, with WRDSB results meeting the provincial standard in Reading, and 1% above in Writing and Math. Compared to our results in the 2021-22 EQAO assessment, this represents:

- Reading -1%
- Writing +0%
- Math +2%

Grade 9 Math

For the Grade 9 math assessment, the WRDSB results showed we were 1% above the provincial standard. Compared to our results in the 2021-22 assessment, this represents a 4% increase.

OSSLT

In the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) results for the 2022-23 school year, the WRDSB results were equal to the provincial standard. Compared to our results in the 2021-22 assessment, we see no change.

EQAO MLL Primary and Junior Assessments

A year ago, we shared data for our MLL students' performance. At the time, it revealed a lot of work to do better. We took that to heart and staff continued to work hard at doing better. Taking a closer look at the most recent EQAO assessment data, specifically focusing on our multilingual learner (MLL) students, we see even more to be proud of. When we compare the results for 2022-23 to the previous school year, we see that there were notable increases in the number of MLL students achieving the provincial standard at the primary and junior assessments.

Grade 3:

- Reading +13%
- Writing +14%
- Math +17%

Grade 6:

- Reading +20%
- Writing +15%
- Math +31%

The good news continued at the secondary level, too. We saw a 21% increase in the Grade 9 math assessment, and a 35% increase in the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) compared to the previous school year.

These results are especially impressive, recognizing that WRDSB has traditionally been below the provincial standard in MLL assessments. Now, we find ourselves above the standard in six areas.

Suspensions and Expulsions

Our work in the area of suspensions and expulsions remains rooted in anti-racist, anti-oppressive, anti-discriminatory and anti-carceral practices. We're seeing the results of this work in a drastic reduction in suspensions and expulsions, even when taking into account the removal of discretionary suspensions in Kindergarten to Grade 3.

Using suspension days as a measure of the effects of suspensions, we've seen this indicator reduce from more than 10,000 suspension days in the 2018-19 school year, to 7,000 in the 2022-23 school year. As a result of various learning modes over the past few school years the best comparator to this year's suspension and expulsion data is 2018-2019.

This is as a direct result of understanding that human rights must be foundational to the work we do as a system. We know this progress alone is not enough. We are committed to continued growth in an effort to systematically reach each and every student that we serve.

Student Achievement

Student academic achievement and well-being represent our core work. We are committed to making our schools places where every student can be successful. However, we know we can't do this alone. We are committed to meaningful

engagement that is open, accessible, inclusive and responsive. We know that decisions are improved by working with students, families and community members.

In May, we hosted the Transforming Education: Literacy and Numeracy for a Changing World event. The event highlighted the programs and partnerships available through WRDSB, from how we're transforming STEM education, to the innovative work educators are doing to de-stream math and English. The evening presented a unique opportunity for attendees to hear directly from educators and students about how they are developing knowledge, skills, and interests to help them succeed in their chosen path. Students shared examples of their work and spoke directly about how their learning experiences provided them opportunities for growth and supported their academic success.



Preparing students for the success as we head towards the 22nd century, using a public education system conceived of before humans had discovered flight, is an uphill challenge. Instead, we're transforming education as we know it, with those we serve.

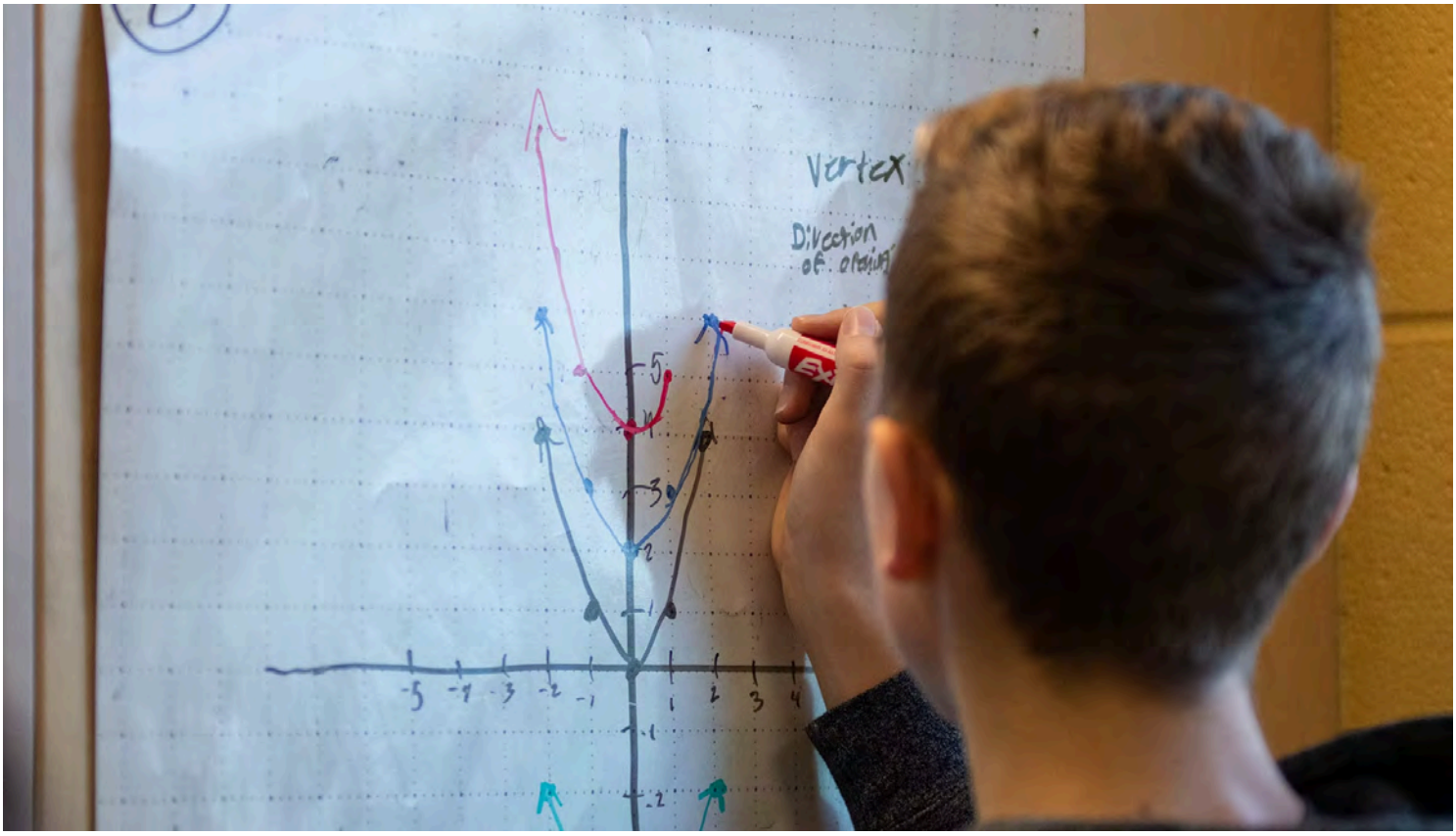
Our efforts to support students in key subject areas like math and literacy are starting to pay off. We still have much work ahead of us to get where we want to go. However, the latest Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessment results from the 2022-2023 school year reinforce the strategies and approaches educators are employing in their classrooms. WRDSB students are surpassing or meeting provincial results in all but one assessment area. Not only do these results show us that we're on the right track with our work, but they also help to guide us in better supporting students to achieve their full potential.

Math Action Plan

We're already putting enhanced learning and instruction strategies into action, like our new WRDSB Math Action Plan. While guidance from the Ministry of Education recommends that school boards focus our attention in our math strategies on schools with the most need, our enhanced mathematics strategy is for **ALL WRDSB students**.

The Math Action Plan outlines our commitment to empower all students to achieve their full potential while providing pathways for students to meet their postsecondary goals. Our approach builds on the guidance from the Ministry of Education by expanding focus from only the schools with the most need to every student we serve. Our goals span all grade levels, from kindergarten to graduation. It's a plan that supports all students, and all educators.

We know that a strong, foundational understanding of mathematics is a fundamental part of supporting students in achieving their full potential, and providing pathways for student success after graduation. Our Math Action Plan is a key part of our work to ensure that identity and social location no longer predict student outcomes.



This work is supported by the amazing efforts ongoing in Grade 9 and 10 classrooms across our secondary schools to implement de-streaming. We saw the impacts this is making for student achievement demonstrated in Angela Schaefer's math class at Huron Heights Secondary School (HHSS). The single stream Grade 10 class means that students aren't required to make a choice between applied or academic level courses before they have an idea of what they want to do after they graduate. It also means that when they are asked to decide in Grade 11, they can do so equipped with a better understanding of where they want their learning journey to take them.

Of course, Math is not all we are focused on. Amazing work is also ongoing in Literacy, which we saw reflected in the results of our 2022-23 BIEP. Specifically, we were pleased to see more than three quarters of Grade 2 students achieve a final grade of

B- or higher in reading on their final report card. This is an important milestone in our commitment to having all students reading confidently by the time they enter Grade 3.

As we continue to make our work more transparent with the community, we will also be sharing our Literacy Action Plan with the community. Stay tuned for that!

Well-being

Students and staff across WRDSB continue to shape our approach with feedback about their experiences through the Safe, Caring and Inclusive School and Guarding Minds at Work surveys. Together with students, staff, parents, caregivers and families, we are building our capacity to create equitable and inclusive learning opportunities rooted in a culture of respect for sovereignty, human rights and equity.

In May, I was honoured to speak with over 100 students from WRDSB secondary schools who took part in the first-ever Student Wellness Conference. The event brought together students, staff and community partners at The Family Centre in Kitchener for a day to focus on equipping students with the information and resources they need to support their mental health and well-being. It was exciting to see students coming together to share new ideas and create innovative methods of addressing the challenges they see in their schools and communities. As I said back in May, the answers are with you.

Charter for Engagement

We believe it takes a village to raise a child and we need many villages across the region to help us raise all the children in WRDSB. One of the things we heard loud and clear through the Strategic Planning process was the need to help you see the results of the feedback you have given to us. We are committed to being clearer about how what you tell us changes how we work.

In September, we unveiled our framework to transform education through engagement. It has three separate plans, with tailored approaches to fostering partnerships and increasing agency for students, families and community members.



Though we aim to bring our community together, towards our shared goals of supporting student achievement and well-being, we find ourselves doing so in an increasingly polarized world and community.

As we work to build a better education system, one which truly serves the needs of all students, we hear calls for a move "back to basics." The implications of these calls can mean keeping intact a public education system that serves some students better than others, and one where identity and social location too often predict outcomes. These are really calls to keep public education a system of exclusivity, where some have all the opportunity, and in spite of the hardest work of many, others do not. We are staying focused on literacy, numeracy and compassionate citizenship for the world students are going to graduate into. Language and Math skills need to apply to a new rapidly shrinking world with ever increasingly complex challenges, with new technologies such as Artificial Intelligence, changing economies and global environmental realities.

We are preparing students for jobs that have not yet been conceived to solve problems that have not yet occurred. In these challenging times, I call all of those who make up WRDSB - students, families, staff and community members - to our shared humanity. Let us focus on our collective goal of serving all students in their academic achievement and well-being towards the landscape and world they will enter into. This is how we will create better global citizens, who have the right skills, talents and abilities necessary to be successful and for a future we all deserve together.



Student Voice

As an education system, we serve approximately 65,000 students. As we listened to them through the Strategic Planning process and through multiple platforms such as focus groups, roundtables and other platforms, we know that they want to have a stronger voice in their education. This is even more critical as we prepare them for the future.

This includes providing them with innovative classroom-based, learning opportunities that have real-world impact. This year, we saw elementary and secondary students taking part in a design thinking project led by their educators in partnership with Smart Waterloo Innovation Labs (SWRIL), and receiving funding to take their plans from words to action. Secondary students returned to the University of Waterloo's Electric Vehicle challenge, allowing them to hone skills in subject areas from the arts to engineering as they competed in electric vehicles they built themselves.

The skills WRDSB students are learning from their educators will allow them to succeed in the world they graduate into. It's a place we cannot yet truly imagine; however, we do know the skills and knowledge that students will need to thrive.



As we engage Design Thinking in our classrooms, students are already taking the lead through events like the Groh Global Gala. This gala brought community members into the school to look at the learning outcomes of students based on months of exploration and study. It even included the opportunity to sample foods from around the world as they took in student-led displays of dancing and fashion.



Family and Community Engagement

We are a part of a community - we need to live this as a value. As a part of a community, we continue to think about how we can be active supporters of the well-being of the wider community. Issues like food and housing security impact students and

community members. Through our Community and Municipal Roundtables we continue to work to address some of the impacts of these issues on students and families.

To do so provides the best opportunities to become the change we want to see in the world. We are now in the second year of our partnership with A Better Tent City. The success of this community next to our Education Centre is an important reminder that when we look after the most vulnerable members of our communities, we're building communities that better support all of us. We're proud to be a part of this important work that continues to inspire similar efforts across Ontario as a result of this partnership. We are better and stronger when we are together.

We see the results of our collective efforts in action in our work to address food insecurity with our partners at Nutrition for Learning, Food4Kids Waterloo Region and the May Court Club of Kitchener-Waterloo. In April 2023, the Waterloo Education Foundation Inc. (WEFI) reaffirmed our commitment with a $30,000 donation to these same three local organizations. We're working together to create a school system where no student struggles with a lack of access to food.



Our hope is to continually grow, develop and model what partnerships such as this can look like if we all work together.

Staff well-being and leadership

In very trying times we continue to work on helping staff develop a stronger sense of well-being and leadership.

We know that staff well-being directly impacts the academic performance and well-being of the students they serve. We've laid out our commitment to support staff in achieving work-life balance through the Disconnecting from Work protocol, and clarified these expectations in messages to the families and community we serve.

As we continue to listen to staff and what is important to them, we will also be releasing plans that centre Staff Well-being and Leadership Capacity. This supports us as an organization to address the learning and work needed to continue to build sustainable staff capacity and leadership for the organization.



Looking to 2024

As we navigate these challenging times, the work doesn't stop here. We continue to think about how we can position ourselves to support students to develop the skills and characters to lead us towards the 22nd century.

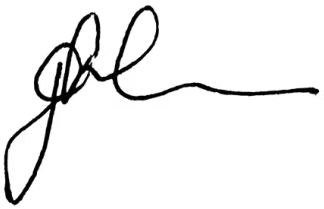
As a Senior Team, with the goal of better serving staff, students and the community, we've all successfully completed part one of the Global Innovation Management Institute's certification in partnership with Smart Waterloo Region. We are now engaged in part two of the GIMI certification and setting our sights on taking what we've learned and applying it to our shared work of transforming education

We know we can't do this important work alone, though. Only by working together with those we serve can we hope to truly reimagine public education. This means unlocking the potential of schools as the hearts of their communities, partnering with families and neighbours to support the success of all students.

2023 has provided an amazing foundation for us to build on in 2024. This means continuing our core work of supporting the academic achievement and well-being of the students we serve, as we reimagine a public education system that truly

provides equitable opportunities and outcomes for all students. This is not something we undertake alone, though. Every parent, caregiver, family or community member is a partner in helping to prepare the students we serve for success in learning and life.

Let's make 2024 another year of creativity, learning, compassion and love in and across the WRDSB.



jeewan chanicka
Director of Education

Waterloo Region District School Board
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Find us on social media

A Message from the Chairperson of the Board of Trustees

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I am pleased to celebrate the incredible accomplishments of staff and students throughout 2023 as we continue to work together to implement our multi-year Strategic Plan.



Throughout the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), we remain focused on our vision of "Celebrating the gifts of each and every student by creating limitless opportunities for them to flourish, grow and become their best selves."

Our six Strategic Directions continue to guide us as we prioritize:

- Centring 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

As Chairperson, it has been my pleasure to lead Trustees and Student Trustees as we engage in governance and decision-making to help all WRDSB students reach their full potential. An important part of our work includes providing accountability and transparency for the public we serve. To do this, we will continue to work together with staff, parents and caregivers, and community members to support student achievement and well-being.

This is the first full year of our multi-year Strategic Plan and we are proud to see the growth in all areas of the plan, particularly the positive progress in the areas of literacy and numeracy as demonstrated through the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments. WRDSB staff remain focused on using data-driven evidence to reinforce strategies and provide the support necessary to enable all students to succeed.

An example is the recently launched Math Action Plan to ensure that identity and social location no longer predict student outcomes and all students have an opportunity to thrive in mathematics. This work is already underway and we can see evidence of the impact of these strategies for supporting mathematics and literacy in the EQAO assessment results. WRDSB students are surpassing provincial results in some subject areas, as well as performing at similar levels to their peers across the province. But we know there is more work to do, and staff and schools continue to focus on enhancing strategies to further improve student learning and well-being.

We know that along with mathematics, literacy is a foundational skill for all WRDSB students. It's our aim to provide this for every student, as demonstrated by our 2022-23 Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP), which is helping us to measure our progress towards having all Grade 2 students achieve a final grade of B- or higher in reading on their final report card. I am proud to say that in the 2022-23 school year, 76% of WRDSB students achieved this level, however, we know our work on literacy is far from over.

Efforts continue across the WRDSB to build educator capacity in implementing structured literacy approaches in their classroom, and to monitor the success of the evidence-based reading practices with students. This past school year, this included support from reading resource teachers at 38 elementary schools across our system. We know we can't do this work alone, though, and we look forward to the partnerships with community organizations that will allow us to reach further heights in supporting all students to develop a love of reading and writing.

We also know it is important for all WRDSB students to feel a sense of belonging in their school communities in order to learn and support their overall well-being. Together, we continue to promote equitable and inclusive learning opportunities to foster a culture of sovereignty, human rights and equity in the WRDSB.

Students are at the center of all of our decision-making and we continue to work together with parents and caregivers as partners in their education to ensure student success. Throughout the past year, Trustees engaged with students, parents, families and caregivers, staff and the community, listening and responding to feedback.

We remain 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. We also continue to highlight progress through our 2022-23 BIEP which incorporates several performance indicators to measure our progress.

We remain focused on advocating for the constituents we serve on both local and provincial issues, from the funding available to school boards to issues that are important to our communities. We are committed to creating a culture of consultation and transparency with the communities we serve. As such, our process for policy review includes regular feedback opportunities from the community and the live stream of Board Meetings helps to make Board decisions and governance accessible and transparent to all.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I would like to acknowledge Director chanicka, along with Senior Staff, and all WRDSB employees for their continued commitment to keeping students at the center of everything we do. We all play a role in supporting their academic success and well-being. By working together we will continue creating learning environments where all students excel as they become skilled, caring, and compassionate global citizens.



Joanne Weston
Chairperson of the Board of Trustees

The Waterloo Region District School Board of Trustees



Joanne Weston

Chairperson

Municipality:

Kitchener



Kathleen Woodcock

Vice-Chair

Municipality:

Waterloo/Wilmot



Bill Cody

Municipality:

Cambridge/North Dumfries



Samantha Estoesta

Municipality:

Waterloo / Wilmot



Carla Johnson

Municipality:

Cambridge / North Dumfries



Joe Meissner

Municipality:

Woolwich / Wellesley



Scott Piatkowski

Municipality:

Waterloo / Wilmot



Maedith Radlein

Municipality:

Kitchener



Mike Ramsay

Municipality:



Meena Waseem

Municipality:



Cindy Watson

Municipality:

Kitchener Kitchener Cambridge/North Dumfries

Waterloo Region District School Board
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Find us on social media

A Message from Student Trustees Abdullah Awan and Casper Dong



With just over a month left of 2023, the time is right to take a look back and reflect on all that Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) students accomplished.

The things we learn in classrooms at our schools today are equipping us to make positive and meaningful changes in the communities where we live now and in the future. Students are making change in big and small ways, from the secondary students who are pitching ideas to address real-world problems for a chance to receive funding from Smart Waterloo Region

Innovation Lab (SWRIL) to the elementary students who successfully advocated to have banana bread return to the school menu. Our voices are making the WRDSB and our community a better place.

As Student Trustees, we represent the power of student voice, along with the skills and knowledge we learn from educators, to our work at the Board table. As advocates for all WRDSB students, we are committed to representing those that the school board serves each and every day.

A 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 honoured to be part of the:

- Student Senate/Roundtable
- Equity and Inclusion committee
- Environmental Sustainability committee
- Policy Working Group
- Internet Content Filtering committee
- Tim Walker Memorial Award committee

Looking ahead to 2024, we will continue to work 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 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.

We encourage WRDSB students to reach out to us through email, or Instagram to provide feedback, ask questions, or seek support.

Speaking for our present and future Student Trustees, as well as past representatives, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all those who have supported our mission to prioritize students. To the wonderful students of WRDSB, it has been, is, and will forever be an honor to serve you!

Abdullah Awan and Casper Dong
2023-24 Student Trustees



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By the Numbers

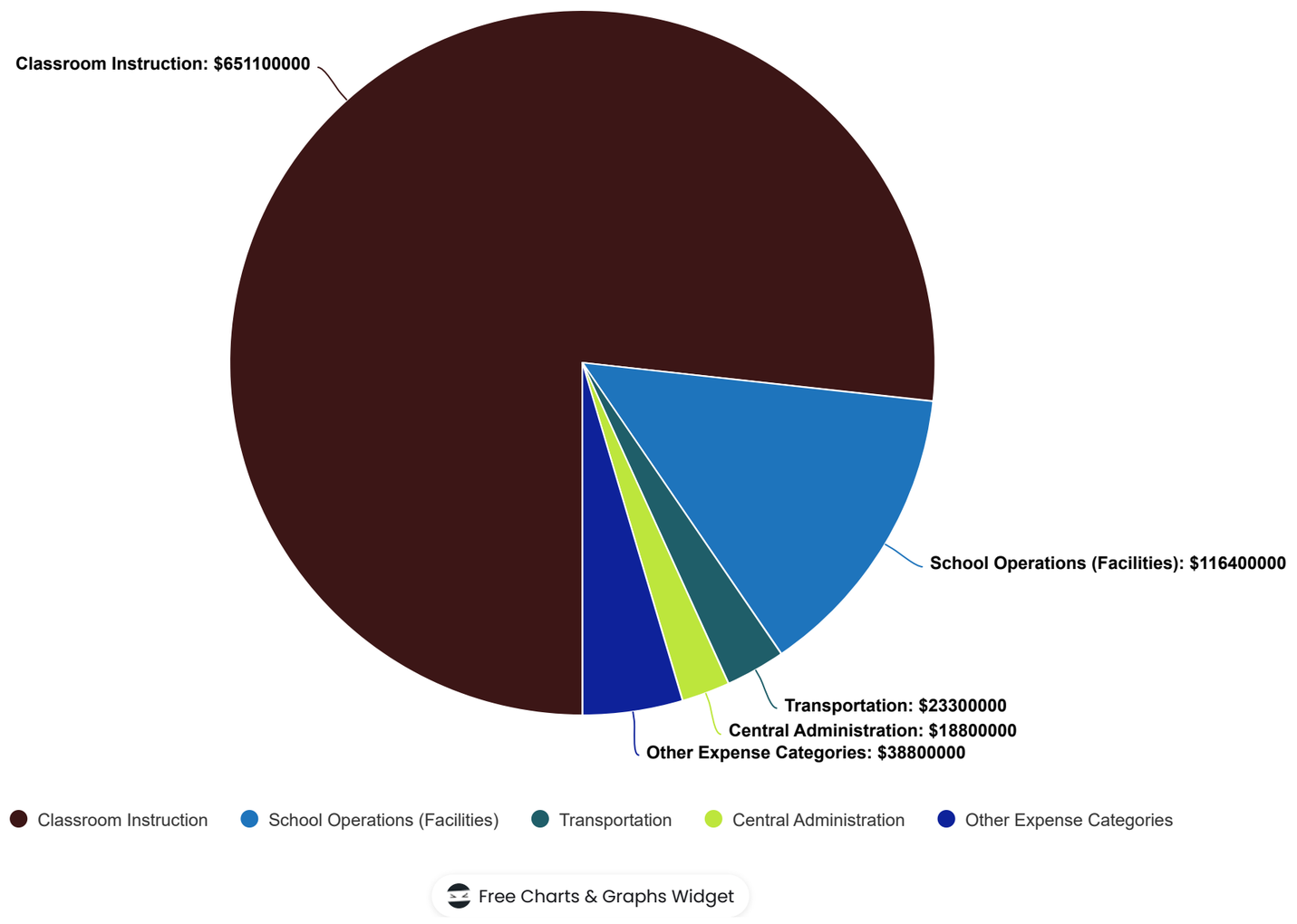
On Monday, June 19, 2023, Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) trustees approved a budget comprising $848M in expenditures, with a capital budget of $95.6M for the 2023-24 school year.

The development of the Waterloo Region District School 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:

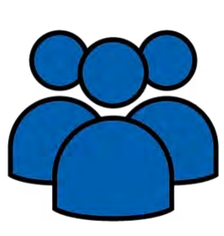
• Ministry funding and directives
• The WRDSB's underlying financial position (accumulated surplus and deficit)
• The WRDSB's Strategic Plan

The approved budget for 2023-24:

- Complies with provincial legislation
- Ensures the long-term fiscal stability of the board
- Supports the achievement of the strategic directions outlined in the Strategic Plan
- Centres students, especially those most marginalized



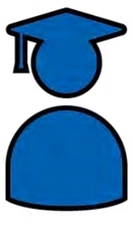
Enrollment in WRDSB



65,329



45,014



20,315

Total Students



19,081

First Language is NOT the language of instruction*

Elementary Students



34,500**

Students with their own WRDSB Chromebook

Secondary Students



4,096

Extended Day Enrolment



11,000**

Total number of employees

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

**This number is approximate

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WRDSB Senior Team

In 2023, 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, every member of the Senior Team successfully completed part one of the Global Innovation Management Institute's certification in partnership with Smart Waterloo Region. We are now engaged in part two of the GIMI certification and setting our sights on taking what we've learned and applying it to our shared work of transforming education.



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



Deepa Ahluwalia
Human Rights & Equity Advisor



Jodi Albrecht
Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



Miruna Armellini
Controller, Financial Services



Justin Brown
Senior Manager, Human Resource Services



Vida Collis
Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



Ron Dallan
Manager of Capital Projects



Carol Dey
Executive Manager, Human Resources Services



Jay Fedosoff
Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



Evelyn Giannopoulos

Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



Crissa Hill

Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



Heather Hughes

Senior Manager, Communications



Pam Kaur

Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



Nick Landry

Superintendent of Business Services & Treasurer



Bill Lemon

Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being



Dana Liebermann

Executive Manager, Research & Organizational Transformation



Ivanna MacIsaac

Executive Manager of Information Technology and Digital Transformation



Michelle Newlands

Superintendent of Student Achievement & Well-Being

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Centering Students

We're building a public education system that serves the needs of all students hand-in-hand with the students we serve. This means putting them at the centre of our work as we make decisions that impact their opportunities for achievement, learning and growth. We're committed to centring their ideas, feedback and voices as we collaborate in the creation of a public school system where every student has a sense of connection and belonging at school.

Our goal of centring students requires a focus on supporting equitable access, opportunities and outcomes for all students. This means providing increased resources and measures to support the success of Indigenous, Black, racialized and marginalized students. It means holding true to our commitments to address the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action.



In 2023, we saw students centered in countless ways across our system. Not only did we launch a new Student Agency and Voice plan, students are now directly supporting us in sharing news from their schools, with the new #StudentVoice series. So far, students from Grade 4 to Grade 12 have provided us first-hand accounts of their achievement and learning experiences in a range of subjects, from hip-hop and poetry to student leadership.



Students across the system demonstrated their skills and abilities as leaders, including at the Board table. In May, Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) and the Public Board Council of OSTA-AECO announced that Kenzy Soror and Vaishnave Raina, student trustees of WRDSB, were the recipients of the 2023 Ontario Public Student Trustee Leadership Scholarship.

Kenzy and Vaishnave were recognized for their instrumental contributions to creating a new student trustee election process. The voting process, which was implemented in the February 2023 student trustee election, ensured accessibility, transparency, equity, and inclusivity for all WRDSB secondary students. It was a stunning example of student voices helping to centre the voices of their peers across Waterloo Region.



Students at Groh Public School in Kitchener were centred in their learning journey thanks to a design thinking approach used by their teachers. We first caught up with the students in December 2022, as they set out with the goal of improving the experiences of newcomers in their community. Groups of students in the class created proposals to address a need, and pitched it to a panel of Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab (SWRIL) representatives. Four groups received funding, and put their plans into action.

In September 2023, their plans became reality, with the Groh Global Gala showcasing the efforts of the four groups. Their projects included the Groh Global Gala event itself, a children's book called "Deliciously Different", the addition of community-building murals throughout the school, and the creation of a podcast focused on sharing the voices of those in the school community. Vihaan, one of the students behind the Gala, explained that the result of their learning was about more than just receiving a mark.

"The project helps people, it's not just about a test," said Vihaan. "It brings something to the community."



Students in the WRDSB continue to be recognized for their academic excellence along with the strength and clarity of their voices. Jomi Oyediran, a student at Cameron Heights Collegiate Institute (CHCI) in Kitchener received the Capstone Scholarship to support her studies in Political Science at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

Oyediran's ability to bring people together to share their own voices stood out to her teachers, including her History teacher Fraser Haig, who saw her ability to foster meaningful discussions amongst her peers on historic and contemporary topics.

"I am always impressed by her effort and her contributions to class discussions," said Haig. "Through grace, kindness and empathy, Jomi builds bridges and helps bring people together to seek greater understanding."

Read more about how we're centring students in WRDSB:



Microforests Bloom New Spaces for Learning | #StudentVoice



Youth Redefine Education at TEDx Columbia Lake Youth Event



Laurel Heights student representing Canada at International Science & Engineering Fair

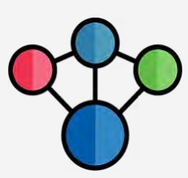
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Support for student and staff well-being



Equitable opportunities and outcomes



Strengthen connections through family and community engagement



Increase student learning through engagement



Collaboration and compassion for transformation

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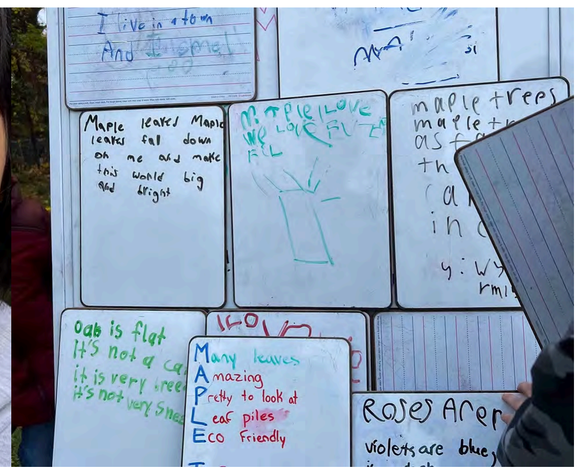
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Microforests Bloom New Spaces for Learning | #StudentVoice



It was an exciting day for Southridge Public School students on Friday, October 27, as we celebrated the new Microforest! The new addition is planted by the Kindergarten play area, next to the outdoor classroom. Two classes at a time were called down during the day, and they got to do some activities in the microforest. There were approximately 75 trees. My favourite activity was the one where we wrote a poem about nature. There were different stations with cool activities such as microscopes, chalk, etc. The activities were based on art and science, which are learning subjects.





I've learned that these trees cannot be touched, and if you do accidentally touch the trees, it's fine, but make sure the tree is alright. One of the highlights of the microforest event was when I read in front of my sister, my mom, and my dad. I'm excited for when the trees are big and the other, younger kids at our school get to see the trees when they are nice and big, and kids get to run through them and play.

If you ever come to Southridge, make sure to take a look at the microforest. Maybe when you go there the trees will still be small, or maybe the trees will be very big. Either way, you will not be disappointed.

Written by Ruby Finn, a Grade 4 student at Southridge PS in Kitchener



On October 27, our school had a big introduction to our new microforest. Our microforest has roughly 75 trees. I learned about coniferous trees, deciduous trees and shrubs.

Two classes came out at a time, listened to the speech and got to explore the seven different stations. My favourite station was the one with the microscopes. It was so fun looking at things close up. There were also stations where you could write poems, draw with chalk, etc.

I think the highlight of the event was reading the speeches over and over again in front of classes, including my brother's. I am excited about how big our microforest will be in the future and to learn outside in it.

Written by Adrija Tiwari, a Grade 5 student at Southridge PS in Kitchener

Microforests in the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB)

The microforest at Southridge PS is one of 12 at schools across the WRDSB, planted in partnership with Sustainable Waterloo Region (SWR). Beyond the environmental benefits, microforests offer several advantages for the students who attend the schools where they are planted. These include additional shade in the schoolyard, and perhaps more importantly, additional outdoor educational opportunities as they feature a variety of fauna and flora to study.

#StudentVoice Series

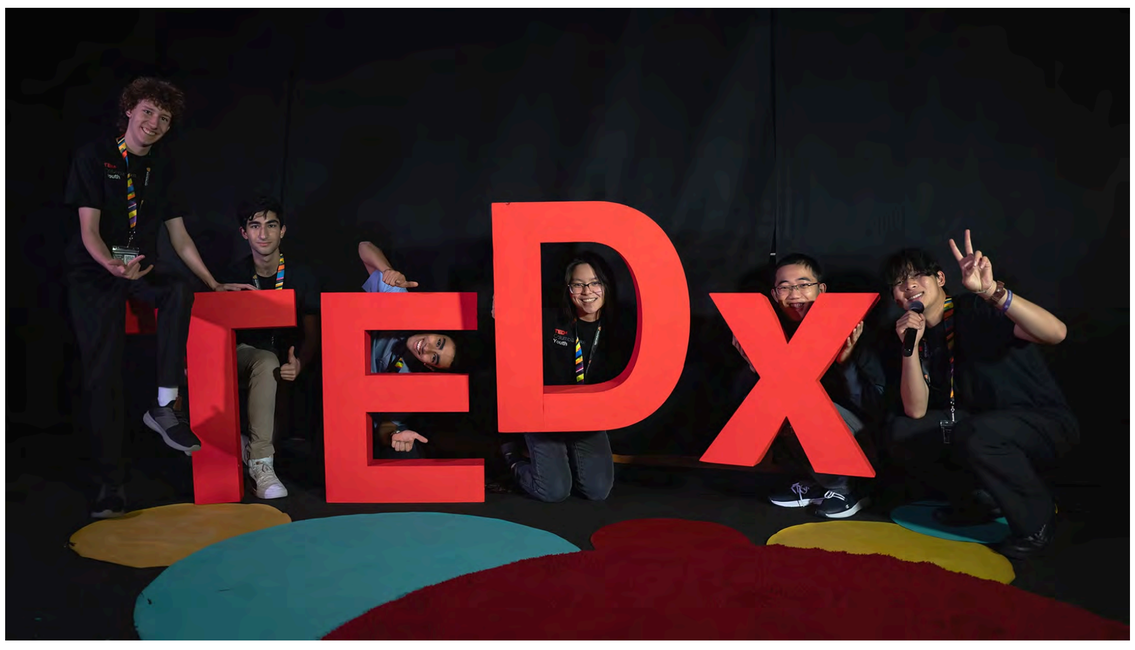
These articles are written by a WRDSB student and are part of the Student Agency and Voice program. Student journalists embody WRDSB's commitment to creating space for students to tell their stories. They are ambassadors for their peers as they share their personal experiences and stories about their schools and communities in their unique voices.

Read more #StudentVoice stories.

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Youth Redefine Education at TEDx Columbia Lake Youth Event



In an event that celebrated innovation, inspiration, and education, the TEDxColumbia Lake Youth conference unfolded at the University of Waterloo on October 14, 2023. It showcased the remarkable efforts of young minds on a mission to reinvent education. Organized by a group of passionate students from the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), the event drew speakers and attendees from across the region, including WRDSB students who shared their inspiring stories and visions for the future.

In the spirit of ideas worth spreading, TED created a program called TEDx, which features local, self-organized events to bring people together to share a TED-like experience. TEDxColumbia Lake Youth, where 'x' stands for an independently organized TED event, aims to inspire the next generation of changemakers and leaders to unleash their passions, carve their learning paths, and become catalysts for positive change. The event is part of a broader mission to pave the way for the reinvention of education.



"It's where innovation, inspiration, and education collide," said Hooman Reza Nezhad, the lead organizer of the event. "TEDxColumbia Lake Youth is the celebration of young minds shaping the future. We want to motivate, inspire, and encourage the next generation of changemakers and leaders to unleash their passions, carve their learning paths, and become catalysts for positive change."

The theme of TEDxColumbia Lake Youth centred around the concept of reinventing education, encouraging young audiences to seek learning experiences outside the traditional classroom setting. The event featured a lineup of expert speakers who shared recent case studies and strategies spanning the personal, societal, and physical branches of learning.



In a series of thought-provoking talks, speakers at TEDxColumbia Lake Youth touched upon various aspects of education transformation, from personalized learning approaches to the role of technology and the importance of empathy in

education. The event provided a platform for young people to explore the many facets of reinventing education, empowering them to be the driving force behind this positive change.



With the success of TEDxColumbia Lake Youth 2023, the event's organizers and participants have taken a significant step towards making the future of education brighter, more inclusive, and profoundly innovative.

A big congratulations to the team behind the event, including Hooman Reza Nezhad, Yoyo Yuan, Victor Feng, Aasha Khan, Jeffrey Zang, Lauren Hsu, Shawn Xiao, Cathy Liu, Casper Dong, Ayush Malhotra, Liam McNamara, Moulik Budhiraja, David Raicu and David Jora.

#WRDSB Invests in Student Initiatives

TedX Columbia Lake Youth is part of the WRDSB's ongoing work to Invest in Student-Led Initiatives. This program incentivizes and supports students' interest and care for their communities. It aims to enable students to create change by promoting their efforts, connecting them with partners and providing them with a platform to share their initiatives.

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Support for Student and Staff Well-Being



We're building a caring and inclusive school community in WRDSB by supporting the mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health of all students and staff. When a student's well-being is supported, they're able to do their best in the classroom, and the same is true for the staff who serve them. Supporting the mental health and well-being of everyone in our buildings has a direct and positive impact on our core work: fostering the academic success of all students.

The first step to supporting the mental health of students and staff is breaking down the stigma when it comes to open and honest discussions on the topic. jeewan chanicka, director of education, shared about his own journey. In May 2023, during mental health week, Director chanicka shared that while it can sometimes be hard to know when to ask for help, there is always help available.

"There should not be any stigma around this. But the truth is – there is. To do my part and help break the stigma," said director chanicka. "I wanted to share some snapshots from my own story with you, and share some of the ways that I've been able to support my own wellness."



Students and staff from across WRDSB stood up to share their voices in support and talk about how they support their own mental health as part of the #MyStory series. Whether it's playing a game of basketball, spending some time baking, or just taking some me-time, there are a whole range of ways that members of the WRDSB community are supporting their mental health and well-being.

Ensuring that our staff have healthy and professional boundaries between work and home is an important part of our commitment and is an investment in positive mental health and the ability to serve and support students.

As part of a strategy to support and encourage all Ontarians in achieving greater work-life balance, the province passed the *Working for Workers Act* in December 2021. In line with that, WRDSB has developed the Disconnecting from Work Protocol, which sets parameters for employees' availability and supports a positive shift in our organizational culture. We know that a healthy, family-friendly workforce will make a positive difference for all schools, and all students.

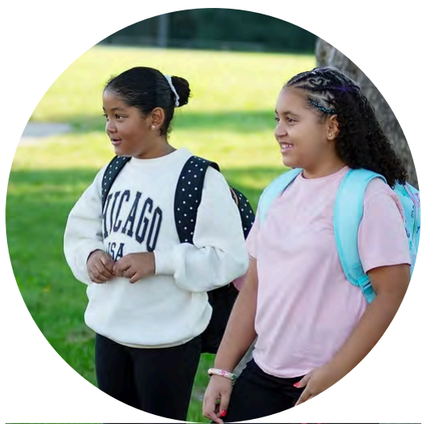


We're committed to a data and evidence driven approach to supporting student and staff well-being. Like school boards across the province, WRDSB seeks feedback from students about their experiences in school. In fact, the Ministry of Education requires all school boards to conduct voluntary school climate surveys. The results from the surveys help to provide insight into students' views as well as a gauge of the existing culture within schools.

The Safe, Caring and Inclusive Schools Survey (SCIS) uses the Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) to learn more about school climate, in particular how students feel about their school experience. The data helps us to determine what is working well, and where work needs to be done to improve a student's environment.

One tool we're using to help improve school environments is a new Anonymous Bullying Reporting Tool, available for all students on every school website. Students can use it to anonymously report safety concerns related to bullying for themselves, or on behalf of another student. It is one pathway, among many, available to students to report student safety concerns related to bullying.

Read more about how we're supporting student and staff well-being:



Supporting Safe, Caring and Inclusive Schools



WRDSB Students Learn to be Kind to Their Minds at Student Wellness Conference



Fred Fox Visits Breslau Public School | #StudentVoice

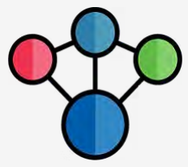
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Centring Students



Equitable opportunities and outcomes



Strengthen connections through family and community engagement



Increase student learning through engagement



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Supporting Safe, Caring and Inclusive Schools



The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) recognizes the importance of students' social, emotional and physical health and well-being and how this impacts them developing stronger connections to school and a greater sense of belonging with the ultimate goal of students achieving academic success. Being part of an equitable, inclusive and accessible school environment supports WRDSB students to reach their full potential.

In order to better understand students' sense of belonging at school, health and well-being, WRDSB conducted the Safe, Caring and Inclusive School Survey for students in Grades 4-12 in November 2022. This survey is confidential, anonymous and only aggregated results were shared with schools. The results for each school are reviewed independently, and not compared, as each school community operates with its own unique sets of strengths and challenges.

Using the Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) as our survey, the students were asked about their:

- Social and emotional development, such as self-esteem, optimism, happiness and empathy
- Feelings of connectedness to school, family, friends, and communities
- School experiences
- Physical health and well-being
- Time use after school hours, as well as students' wishes for after-school time



What WRDSB students shared

One of the six WRDSB strategic directions is to ensure that: "Every student and staff member will learn and work in environments that engage them and support their mental health and well-being."

In the Mental health, well-being and engagement section of the Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP), three of the indicators we tracked in 2022-2023 were based on the Safe, Caring and Inclusive School Survey.

Of the total number of respondents, 71% of students in Grades 4-6, 49% of students in Grades 7-8 and 40% of students in Grades 9-12 indicated they "agree a little" or "agree a lot" to the statement: "I feel like I am important to this school".

The MDI Well-being Index consists of measures relating to children's physical health and social and emotional development that are of importance during the middle years: Optimism, Happiness, Self-Esteem, Absence of Sadness and General Health. On the MDI, a "high well-being" categorization represents students who reported positive responses on at least 4 of the 5 measures and no low range scores.

The results from the survey indicated the percentage of students with high well-being as:

- Grade 4-6: 34%
- Grade 7-8: 26%
- Grade 9-12: 20%

Read the Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP) for 2022-23 for additional updates from the Safe, Caring and Inclusive School Survey.

Building on what we have learned

Based on the results from the survey, we know we have to continue working toward providing all students with learning environments that engage them and support their mental health and well-being. We have strategies in place to support this work, including providing job-embedded learning for principals and vice-principals with a focus on sovereignty affirming and equity competencies. We are also working with school administrators and educators on a learning series on Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis and Inuit Voices Studies course, and Dismantling Anti-Black Racism.

Some of the other ways we are supporting capacity building for administrators and educators to improve student success and well-being:

- Provided educator learning series to support the implementation of the Grade 11 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Voices as the Grade 11 English course in all WRDSB secondary schools.
- Supported implementation of school based groups (e.g., Affinity Groups, GSAs, Student well-being teams).
- Hosted student conferences (e.g., Black Brilliance).
- Developed and launched a system campaign to address mental health.
- Developed community engagement tables that include grass root community organizations to participate in wraparound support for students.
- Delivered in class presentations on social-emotional learning and mental health strategies.
- Hosted “lunch and learns” for parents, caregivers and families.
- Provided professional learning for all administrators and educators with a focus on trauma informed practices.

The results of the survey are used at the Board and school levels to inform activities to enhance school engagement, positive learning experiences and academic success.



Supporting Students’ Mental Health and Well-being

All WRDSB Students deserve to feel safe in an inclusive and welcoming school environment where they can show up as their true selves. We know the needs of each student differs and we must work together with parents, caregivers, families and community members to help all students reach their full potential.

Learn more about how to support students’ mental health and well-being. Parents and caregivers are also encouraged to reach out to their child’s school for additional support, information and resources.

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Equitable Opportunities and Outcomes



At WRDSB, it's our goal to reimagine and transform public education to create a system where identity and social location are no longer determining factors in student outcomes. We know it's not an easy task, given this has been the way public education has worked since it began. The numbers continue to show that a disproportionate number of Indigenous, Black, racialized, queer, students in special education and students coming out of poverty do not reach their full potential in school.

We know we can change this. It means ensuring that all students have the resources, supports and opportunities they need to be successful. We can help to ensure that identity is no longer a factor in outcomes for those we serve, by providing equitable access to learning experiences for students from all backgrounds. All students must have the chance to achieve their full potential on their academic pathway.



In June 2023, we saw the return of the Multilingual Language Learners (MLL) camp for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic. Hosted over three days at Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp, the camp brought together Grade 5 and 6 students who have been in Canada for less than three years.

The MLL team designed the day camp for Grade 5 and 6 students who have been in Canada for less than three years. During the three days, attendees enjoy an array of activities. This year's camp hosted 200 students from more than 30 WRSB schools. The students participated in high and low ropes challenges, archery and tie-dye.

Sharon Newmaster, an ESL/ELD Consultant from the MLL department, expressed her delight at being able to once again, invite students out to the camp.

"It's been a challenging few years due to the pandemic. We are thrilled to finally be able to offer this experience to our students again," said Newmaster. "The camp provides them with new and exciting activities. It also allows them to build relationships and embrace their cultural backgrounds."

At WRDSB, we want every student to feel like they belong, and we know that language plays a key role in creating welcoming spaces. We strive to create a language-friendly environment in every school. To help, we created the Language Friendly Schools Poster, with ideas for helping to welcome all languages in WRDSB schools. Copies of this poster will be shared with our schools.

In February 2023, on International Mother Language Day, jeewan chanicka, director of education and Crissa Hill, superintendent of student achievement and well-being, came together to share their thoughts about the importance of language to identity and how they connect us to who we are.

We know that the task of transforming public education to better support all students is not a task we can accomplish alone. In early spring 2023, Executive Officer Eusis Dougan-Mckenzie, Human Rights Advisor Deepa Ahluwalia and Director jeewan chanicka had the opportunity to meet with members of Adventure4Change, to learn more about their experiences of the work happening at schools.



Adventure4Change is a community-minded organization that offers programming for children, youth, parents and families to become more engaged in the community and help grow vibrant neighbourhoods across the Waterloo region. Their mission is to contribute to a changing world by supporting those who are most marginalized in our community.

It was an opportunity to discuss the incredible work the group is doing to support children and families, as well as our shared goals in ensuring student achievement and belonging and making sure families experience a sense of belonging and inclusion in the WRDSB community.

In May 2023, ten Grade 12 students from across the WRDSB received the Past-Directors' Bursary, awarded to students pursuing a post-secondary pathway in the trades through college or an apprenticeship. It's one part of our efforts to foster excellence as we support Waterloo Region's next generation of skilled tradespeople.

Chairperson Joanne Weston expressed her pride in the students who received the 2022-23 Past-Directors' Bursary. "We are thrilled to offer this bursary to deserving students who have exhibited tremendous potential in pursuing a trade career. By investing in their education, we hope to enable their success and contribute to the growth of skilled trades in our community."

Read more about how we're working to create equitable opportunities and outcomes:



Students Come Together to Celebrate Islamic Heritage Month | #StudentVoice



Students Aim to Improve Experiences of Newcomers with Design Thinking



Building a Culture of Human Rights at WRDSB

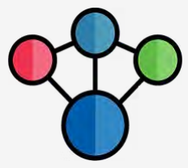
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Building a Culture of Human Rights at WRDSB



Here at WRDSB, we're moving our commitment to building a culture of human rights from words to action through an initiative that Ministry of Education staff in attendance praised as being the first-of-its-kind in Ontario to bring together Trustees, senior staff, union, professional association leaders and senior management for focused learning about Human Rights.



In October and November 2023, Trustees and staff came together for four days of learning with experts from a range of fields that touched on human rights in public education. We were pleased to be joined by colleagues from the Waterloo Catholic District School Board to share in the learning.



Led by staff from the WRDSB Human Rights Branch, including Human Rights and Equity Advisor Deepa Ahluwalia, Human Rights Investigator Leah Martin, and Human Rights Officers Esther Wainaina and Kim Radersma, this was a novel and innovative school board professional development event in Ontario.



It exemplifies the WRDSB's holistic approach to better supporting the academic success of the students we serve. We're transforming education by ensuring that human rights is foundational to their achievement and well-being.



Patrick Case, Assistant Deputy Minister for the Ontario Ministry of Education, spoke to the group about the importance of creating formal structures in public school boards for the purposes of supporting human rights, and actioning commitments to uphold the Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC).



Attendees also had the chance to learn from:

- Barrington Walker, Vice Provost Equity and Inclusion, Professor of History
- Susan Ursel, Ursel Phillips Fellows Hopkinson LLP
- Ruth Goba, Former Interim Chief Commissioner, OHRC/Consultant
- Amanda Dimilta, Senior Policy Advisor, Education Equity Secretariat
- Grace Vaccarelli, Lawyer, Investigator
- Njeri Damali Sojourner-Campbell, Hicks Morley Hamilton Stewart Storie LLP
- Evon Gayle, Hicks Morley Hamilton Stewart Storie LLP
- Jen St. Germain, Chief Strategy Officer, Métis Nation of Ontario



Human Rights at WRDSB

The Human Rights Branch supports the Board in fostering inclusive and respectful learning and working environments for students, staff, trustees and other Board community members

The Human Rights Branch can:

- Help you understand the Human Rights policy
- Answer any questions you might have about sharing your concern
- Describe other policies and procedures that can be used to address your concern
- Commit to a process that is fair
- Talk about all the ways your concerns can be addressed
- Investigate complaints
- Let you know about supports available at the WRDSB or in the community

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Students Come Together to Celebrate Islamic Heritage Month | #StudentVoice



As October has just ended, it is important to reflect upon the heritage that is celebrated every year in Canada. Islamic Heritage Month, or Islamic History Month, is a month designated to recognize the approximately 1.9 billion Muslims around the world and acknowledge the intellectual advancements Muslims have made throughout civilization.

Islam is a religion built on the fundamental belief in one God and following in the footsteps of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the final Prophet in a long line of prophets in Islam. Islamic Heritage Month is an opportunity to celebrate Islam's rich and diverse culture, and foster an understanding of Islamic contributions in science, mathematics, art, and literature. In 2007, the Canadian Parliament officially declared October as Canadian Islamic History Month, acknowledging the significant contributions made by Muslims to Canadian society. The observance strives to oppose stereotypes, misconceptions, and discrimination against Muslims and to promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

Laurel Heights Secondary School (LHSS) hosted an event celebrating Islamic Heritage Month. The event took place on October 26, and schools all across the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) were invited to attend the event and celebrate with fellow Muslim students. The event started with Laurel Heights's Muslim Student Association President and Vice President introducing the event and reciting verses from the Muslim Holy book, the Quran.



A talk by a keynote speaker, Ali Saeed, followed. Ali spoke about several figures in Islam and their contributions to society. One of the most influential individuals mentioned in his talk was Ibn Haytham, an Arab scientist and mathematician who lived during the Islamic Golden Age. Ibn al-Haytham is best known for his work in the optics field, and the study of light and vision. His most famous work, "Kit,ab al-Manazir" or "Book of Optics", explored the properties of light, the nature of vision, and the workings of the human eye.



Another noteworthy figure he mentioned was Fatima al-Fihri, a Muslim woman who founded the world's oldest degree-granting university. She founded the University of al-Qarawiyyin in Fez, Morocco, which is still operating. After Ali Sameed's presentation, students were directed toward the school's cafeteria, decorated with Islamic artifacts and Arabic calligraphy paintings by Laurel Heights students.

Students were given a meal provided by Chef Signature, and the event was wrapped up with a Kahoot on Islamic History Trivia, which was perfectly suited for the event. It is important to highlight the students and staff involved in organizing and running the event, especially those involved in the Laurel Heights Muslim Student Association, as the event couldn't have been possible without their involvement.



My favourite part of the whole event was the atmospheric sensation of unity formed by all of the students. I enjoyed interacting with students from different schools who all share the same belief. A point that the speaker Ali Saeed made that resonated with me the most was when he spoke about his time at LHSS. There were very few Muslims, and there was for sure never an event like this. I am very grateful to be living in a time where there is such a large and supportive Muslim community present and I can be comfortable around people with the same beliefs. Although there is always room for improvement, I am very proud of how far we have come as a community in terms of feeling comfortable practicing my faith.

Recognizing Islamic History Month is of utmost importance for not only Muslims but especially those who don't identify with the Islamic faith. Muslims are often the victims of several harmful stereotypes, and facilitating cultural awareness and understanding by recognizing the contributions of Islamic civilizations helps dispel these destructive misconceptions and fosters a more tolerant society. Islamic Heritage Month is a time to promote inclusivity regardless of cultural or religious backgrounds, as it inspires individuals to foster innovation and pursue their passions to make a difference in society. It is also when individuals are encouraged to engage in interfaith conversations to develop a mutual understanding, creating a more harmonious society. Preserving and sharing Islamic heritage, artifacts, and historical sites enriches the collective understanding of world history. Dedicating a month to Islamic Heritage offers the Muslim community an opportunity to come together, celebrate their heritage and share their contributions to society, fostering a sense of belonging and pride in their achievements.

Overall, Islamic History Month, celebrated in October in Canada, is a crucial recognition of the diverse heritage of Islam and the valuable contributions of Muslims. This month-long celebration promotes cultural understanding, counters stereotypes, and fosters intercultural dialogue. The Laurel Heights Secondary School event exemplified the sense of community and unity such celebrations bring. It is essential for both Muslims and those from different backgrounds to encourage inclusivity, inspire innovation, and enrich our collective understanding of history.

Written by Khadijah Asif, a Grade 12 student at Laurel Heights Secondary School (LHSS) in Waterloo

#StudentVoice Series

This article is written by a WRDSB student and is part of the Student Agency and Voice program. Student journalists embody WRDSB's commitment to creating space for students to tell their stories. They are ambassadors for their peers as they share their personal experiences and stories about their schools and communities in their unique voices.

Read more #StudentVoice stories.

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Strengthen Connections Through Family and Community Engagement



Supporting student success and well-being is a shared responsibility between staff, parents and caregivers and community members. We know that through strong partnerships with families and communities, students are able to thrive in their learning environments.

Building strong home and school connections is critical to improving student achievement and well-being. The Parent Involvement Committee (PIC) and school councils are among some of the ways WRDSB and schools engage with parents and caregivers. With a focus on providing open and accessible communication, WRDSB consults with parents and caregivers throughout the school year to ensure all families experience inclusive engagement in their child's learning. From discussing curriculum updates and new approaches to leading in education to school renaming, we connect with parents, caregivers, community leaders and interested stakeholders to learn how we can work together to build a healthy and inclusive Waterloo Region.



Meaningful engagement starts with listening to community needs. For example, parent-led group Adventure4Change met with jeewan chanicka, director of education, and other staff members to build community connections. Their mission is to contribute to a changing world by supporting those who are most marginalized in our community. By meeting with organizations such as Adventure4Change and other individuals in the community, WRDSB is leading with love and being responsive to what is most important to the communities we serve.

Making sure that students and families feel their identities are reflected in their school environments is an important part of meaningful engagement. WRDSB marks dates of importance through educational information and resources to promote increased awareness and understanding of the diverse communities we serve. WRDSB also hosts events throughout the year, such as National Indigenous History Month and Indigenous Peoples Day; the inaugural Asian Heritage Day at Eastwood Collegiate Institute; Black Brilliance Month; Islamic Heritage Month; and Pride Month to provide education, awareness and foster environments where students and staff see themselves represented and celebrated.



In order to help all students succeed, we must work together to ensure students have the supports necessary to learn and thrive. In order to enable positive Grade 8 to 9 transitions, staff host information nights at secondary schools to meet with students, parents and caregivers to help them better understand the available programs and support services, course selection process, graduation requirements and extracurricular activities. Similarly, families new to the WRDSB and those registering their children for Kindergarten are provided opportunities to connect with staff to learn about how to best support their child as they start their educational journey.

Throughout 2023, we have offered lunch and learn sessions for parents and caregivers to connect with psychology staff to provide resources and information to assist families with supporting their learner. Other sessions have been offered in the areas of assistive technology support, as well as vaping and cannabis education.

We have also launched our vision for Transforming Education, which includes key plans for engaging with parents, caregivers and communities. We know that schools are hubs for communities and provide supports and resources for students and families, beyond student academic achievement. Through collaboration with municipal and provincial governments, local community non-governmental organizations, agencies or coalitions, we can all work together to increase engagement and identify meaningful ways to support students and families.

Read more about how we are strengthening connections through family and community engagement:



Transforming Education: Literacy and Numeracy for a Changing World



Celebrating Parent Connections with Adventure4Change



Strengthening Community Connections

View our other Strategic Directions



Support for student and staff well-being

Equitable opportunities and outcomes

Centring Students

Increase student learning through engagement

Collaboration and compassion for transformation

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Strengthening Community Connections in 2023



We believe it takes a village to raise a child and we need many communities across the region to help us ensure that every student reaches their full potential in the classroom and in life. This means building meaningful, mutually beneficial relationships with the diverse communities that we serve all across Waterloo Region.



This year, as one part of our commitment to Transform Education Through Engagement, we met with a range of community leaders and stakeholders. Many of these meetings are opportunities for WRDSB to gain feedback from those we serve, and the organizations we partner with in serving the needs of students.



In May, we came together with students, families, local community organizers, educators, local government leaders and representatives of the Ministry of Education for an event that showcased how we're transforming education through support for student achievement and well-being. Attendees had the opportunity to participate in interactive demonstrations and presentations, engage with program leads and education experts, and learn about the WRDSB's innovative curriculum. Staff passionately shared strategies and approaches, allowing partners in education to witness and experience the innovative ways in which the WRDSB leads education.

The Caribbean Canadian Association of Waterloo Region and the Congress of Black Women of Canada - Waterloo Region jointly hosted the Awards of Excellence 2023 in September. Several WRDSB staff members were in attendance alongside government officials and representatives from across the Waterloo Region to celebrate the scholarship award recipients who are leaders in their communities.



In November, students and staff took part in the Sikh Remembrance Day event at Mount Hope Cemetery in Kitchener to pay tribute to Sikh-Candian veterans and soldiers. Together with the community, we honoured the remarkable journey of Private Buckham Singh, who became one of only nine Sikh soldiers allowed to serve with the Canadian Forces in WWI.



For decades, the WRDSB has partnered with the United Way Waterloo Region Communities to host an annual staff giving campaign, knowing that together we can help to build a stronger Waterloo Region. Many of the organizations which receive funding from the United Way support WRDSB students and their families with everything from food insecurity to mental health and well-being. In November, staff gathered at the Education Centre to celebrate the beginning of another year of giving, together with leaders of unions and labour groups.

By working together with parents and caregivers, community leaders and partners in education, we will continue to help students thrive and build a healthy and inclusive Waterloo Region.

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Increase Student Learning Through Engagement



We are committed to providing WRDSB students with meaningful and engaging learning experiences to ensure they feel a sense of belonging and joy; develop critical and systems thinking skills; and understand the connection between the classroom and the world around them.

Our plans for Transforming Education Through Engagement outline how WRDSB will work with students, families and community members to ensure that we are making decisions and supporting students in accessible, inclusive, transparent and responsive ways. With the shared goal of improving student achievement and well-being, we continue to focus on the key areas of:

- Student Agency and Voice
- Family and Caregiver Engagement
- Community Engagement



In May 2023, we demonstrated our commitment to educating for the future at Transforming Education: Literacy and Numeracy for a Changing World. The event showcased programs that are developing students' knowledge, skills, and interests to help them succeed in their chosen pathways. We also continue the work to implement de-streaming throughout the secondary curriculum, with a particular focus on de-streaming Grade 9 courses, to support more equitable graduation and achievement outcomes.

The ongoing work to enhance and further improve student learning and well-being is already paying off. The 2022-2023 Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) results showed that WRDSB students are surpassing provincial results in some subject areas, as well as performing at similar levels to their peers across the province. We know that the story told by the EQAO assessment results is not a complete picture and we continue to use this data as one of many ways we measure the impact of our progress.

In September 2023, WRDSB secondary schools began offering the English: Understanding Contemporary First Nations, Métis and Inuit Voices (NBE3U). In alignment with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action for education, this course ensures all students have an opportunity to deepen their knowledge and understanding of Indigenous peoples' perspectives, histories, and literature.



Building connections to students' language and culture is an integral part of developing students' sense of self and feelings of belonging at school. Through school-based supports and System Navigators, we are bridging the gap between equity deserving communities, students, families and the school system. We relaunched the Multilingual Language Learners (MLL) camp for students in Grades 5 and 6. Students were able to apply their new language skills and connect with other newcomers who may be navigating similar language and cultural barriers. WRDSB continues to provide enriching experiences for its students and build a more inclusive and supportive learning environment for all.

In November 2023, we launched the WRDSB Math Action Plan, which aims to support students across all grade levels to create the conditions in which students will thrive in mathematics. By providing all students with mathematics instructional practices that are high-level, equitable and inclusive, we will ensure that identity and social location are no longer predictors of student outcomes. Throughout the school year, we incorporated math intervention programs to assist students to build foundations for success.



Supporting students to have expansive pathways after graduation is a key aspect of our plans to transform education. By setting high expectations, providing diverse and inclusive opportunities, and extracurricular and experiential learning opportunities, we are able to foster students' curiosity, engagement and commitment to lifelong learning.

Programs such as Co-operative Education places in hospitals and long-term care facilities; Dual Credit programs; Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP); and Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) provide students with opportunities to achieve credits towards graduation while also acquiring hands-on experience in potential future career pathways.

Read more about how we are increasing student learning through engagement in WRDSB:



Moving All Students Forward in Single Stream Math Class



Students build language and life skills at Multilingual Language Learners camp



Open Gate Filmmaker Lab Empowers Students Through Innovative Pilot Program

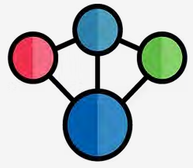
View our other Strategic Directions



Support for student and staff well-being



Equitable opportunities and outcomes



Strengthen Connections Through Family



Centring Students



Collaboration and compassion

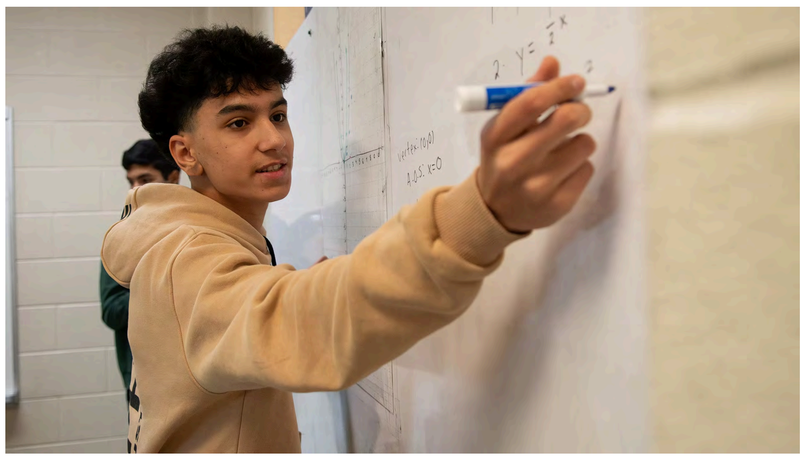
and Community Engagement

for transformation

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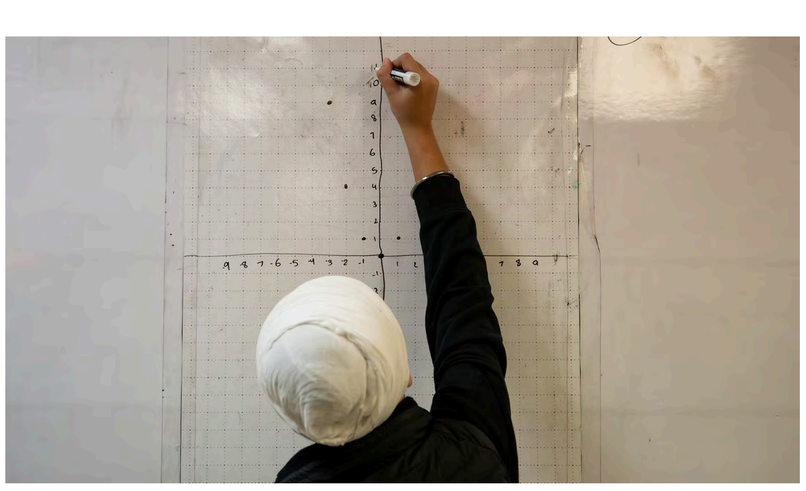
Moving All Students Forward in Single Stream Math Class



As the clock struck 8:00 a.m. on a crisp November morning, the Grade 10 students in Angela Schaefer's math class at Huron Heights Secondary School (HHSS) started the day with a parabolic equation or two.



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



Satparkash is one of Schaefer's students, and explained how she is already feeling more confident in her math abilities only halfway into the Grade 10 school year. She often draws out the problem to visualize it to assist with solving the equation.

"Everyone does have the potential, they just have to figure out how they learn math best," said Satparkash.



So, what's made the difference? The "check your understanding" days, which allow students to confirm their understanding of concepts, are a game changer.

"The practice days, I like how we have those," said Satparkash, noting they help her obtain a better understanding of the individual concepts. "Usually when you learn one topic and practice a little bit, I don't remember it."

Schaefer explained that the "check your understanding" days allow her to work with small groups, offering the opportunity to connect directly with each student to help them accomplish their learning goals.

"I can meet each student where they are at and move them forward," said Schaefer.



This is one of many new strategies educators across the WRDSB have access to as part of our Math Action Plan, introduced in November 2023. Schaefer is also using small, random groupings of students as one of the new tools in her educator toolkit. Each morning, students are given a random group of students to work with, allowing them to talk about what they're learning together and support one another in problem solving. Beyond math, it's an opportunity to build interpersonal skills and new friendships.

"They get a chance to discuss their thinking with each other, [and] clarify their thinking," said Schaefer. "I see them relying on each other and getting to know each other, which aside from the math, is so valuable."

The groups provide a safe space, where they are able to ask questions of each other and of the teacher, without having to do so in front of the whole class.

"They can make mistakes in small groups and it's not as big a deal as putting up your hand in front of the class and making a mistake," said Schaefer.



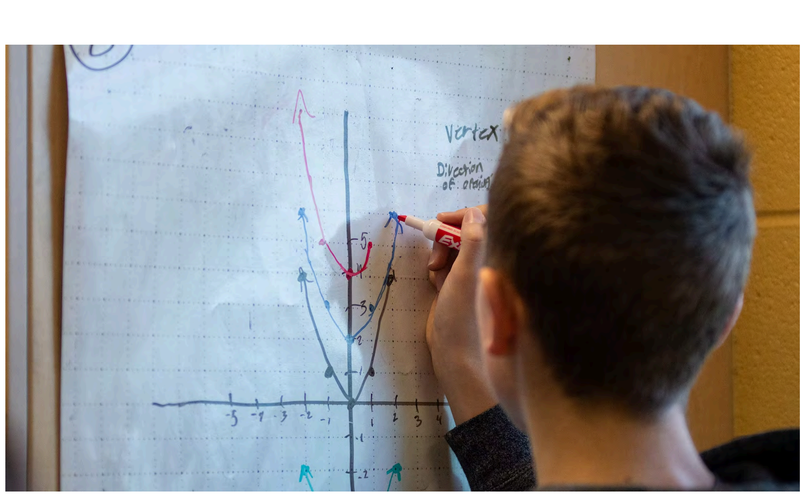
Satparkash is especially enjoying the learning experiences offered by small group instruction opportunities.

"I like how we do groups because if you get stuck other people can help you," she said. "I also like to help other people because that helps me figure out stuff, too."



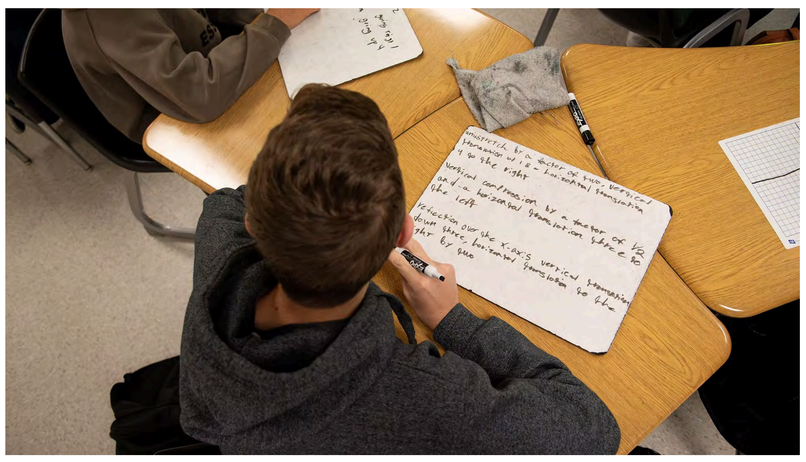
Austin is Satparkash's classmate, and after an hour or so of learning about how to graph parabolas and their different characteristics, he shared how he's feeling so far this school year with his understanding of math and ability to keep up with the topics taught.

"I just got my midterm grade back, I'm feeling pretty good; I like my class," said Austin. "It all seems my pace. I'm not slowed down or sped up by anybody. I'm enjoying it."



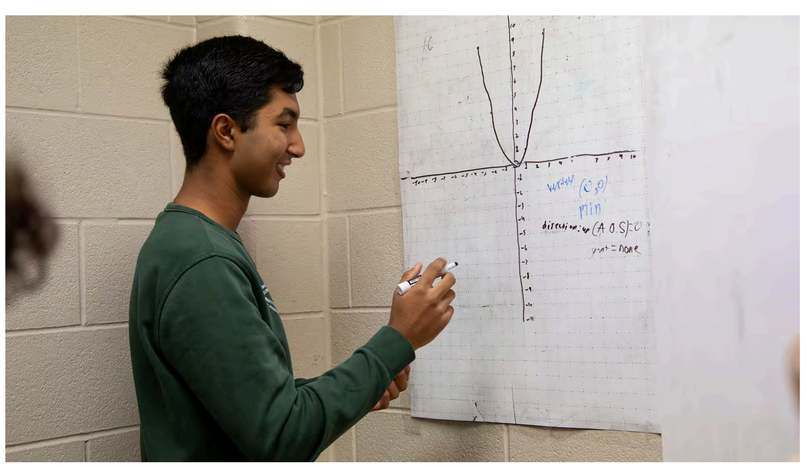
Austin enjoys how Schaefer's approach invites students up out of their seats to engage in group-based learning using the whiteboards that surround the classroom. The chance to try out the skills he's learned helps him to better remember them, and see how they can be used with other concepts and problems.

"I appreciate how much we do, rather than sitting at our desks and just listening," said Austin. "I think the best way to learn math is actually doing it."



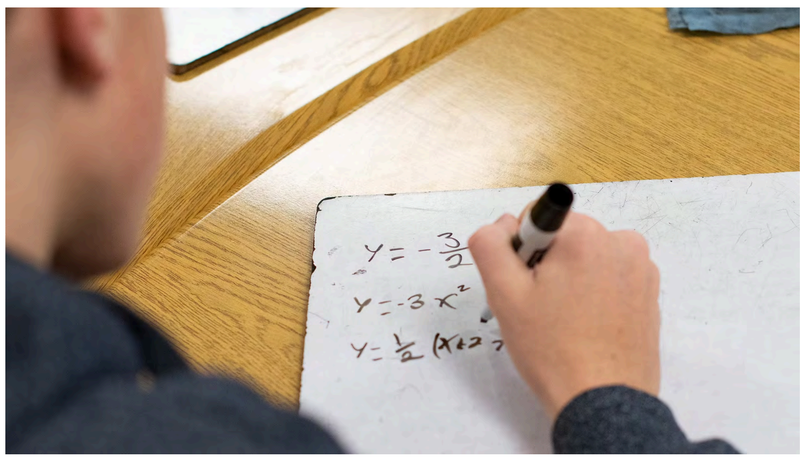
He can appreciate the difference it's making in his abilities in math, too. Austin explained that he's been able to gain confidence with concepts he's struggled with in the past, such as expand and simplify. For him, the small groups and "check your understanding" days have made the difference.

"I think I definitely have improved, I feel much more confident about concepts that I learned last year," said Austin.



Carolyn Gingerich is a secondary consultant in the Learning Support Services department for the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB). Gingerich supports educators at all WRDSB secondary schools as they implement the Math Action Plan, including de-streaming. She explained how the single stream approach in Grade 9 and 10 keeps doors open for students, allowing them to learn more about their desired post-secondary pathway before being asked to make a decision about where they're headed after graduation.

"We are holding those high expectations of all students, and giving all students the opportunity to have access to any pathway that they would like in Grade 11," said Gingerich. "It keeps those options open and gives students the opportunity to see what those possibilities are."



Schaefer added that fostering success for all students in a single stream classroom comes down to meeting students where they are in their learning journeys, and working together with them to take the next step in their academic growth.

"If students feel like they belong in the class, and that they can be successful, that's going to go way further than any other strategy," added Schaefer.

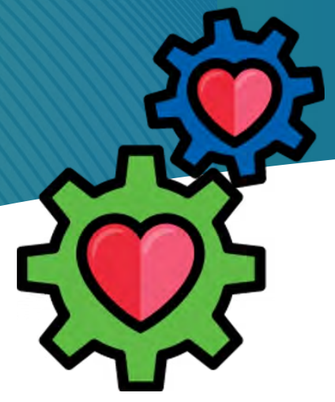
The WRDSB Math Action Plan

This story is just one in our series highlighting the work happening in classrooms across the WRDSB as part of our Math Action Plan. Stay tuned for future stories that will share how we're building skills for students in Grade 7 and 8, and the tiered supports available in Grade 3 and 6 to support all students in feeling confident in their mathematical abilities.

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Collaboration and Compassion for Transformation



In order to serve WRDSB students to help them reach their full potential, we know that we must push the boundaries of the existing education structures which have traditionally benefited some, but not all. We are focused on transforming education to prepare students for success in the future, no matter their chosen pathway.

Transforming education is not an easy feat. We are focused on centering students in all decision-making and letting students' voices lead our action strategies. It is important to reimagine education to ensure that our approach to supporting student learning is reflective of and responsive to their needs in a changing world.



This year, we shared our plans for Transforming Education. We know this important work is not something the WRDSB can do alone. We do this work in partnership with the students we serve, parents and caregivers, families and the surrounding community.

It is important for students to see themselves reflected in their learning environments and the course materials as this has a direct impact on their sense of belonging in schools. WRDSB staff understand that in the classroom "is where the magic happens." Through creating opportunities for students to engage in design and systems thinking, they are able to be active participants in creating solutions to support change in Waterloo Region. WRDSB students have an understanding of their civic responsibilities and have opportunities to exercise their learning and leadership to contribute to conversations about sustainability, safety and accessibility.



Students are actively engaged in identifying problems in their communities, developing solutions and for some, their visions are realized through a partnership with Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab (SWRIL). WRDSB students are cultivating an understanding of nutrition and food security. Using a near-peer learning style, where students of various ages work to support one another, the students are able to engage in hands-on learning while also supporting the local Youth in Food Systems programs. WRDSB students are also recognized for their contributions and respect for environmental stewardship.

This past year, Waterloo Education Foundation Inc. (WEFI) renewed its commitment to funding local organizations that support student nutrition programs. A donation of $30,000 was distributed to community partners Food4Kids Waterloo Region, the May Court Club of Kitchener-Waterloo and Nutrition for Learning who directly support student learning through combating food insecurity in Waterloo Region.

A commitment to transforming education extends throughout the organization. The Senior Team has completed the first part of the Global Innovation Management Institute's (GIMI) certification, in partnership with SWRIL.

Read more about how we are supporting collaboration and compassion for transformation in WRDSB:



WRDSB students contribute big ideas at Council for a Day event



Preparing Waterloo Region's Future Change Makers Through Systems Thinking



Students lead partnership with City of Kitchener through LoveMyHood matching grant

View our other Strategic Directions



Support for student and staff well-being



Equitable opportunities and outcomes



Strengthen Connections Through Family



Increase Student Learning



Centring Students

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Students lead partnership with City of Kitchener through LoveMyHood matching grant



Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational School (KCI) leadership students unveiled a Progress Pride Flag inspired sidewalk, in partnership with the City of Kitchener and local community groups in late August. Spearheaded by Co-Prime Minister Regan McCorkindale, KCI's leadership students worked with the City of Kitchener to apply for a LoveMyHood Matching Grant to highlight the school and city's support of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.



On August 28, student leaders and representatives from each organization came together to celebrate the unveiling of the welcoming and inclusive symbol in a place of prominence right outside the school.



It was an extra-special day for McCorkindale, a recent graduate of KCI heading to Dalhousie University to study Marine Biology. She reflected on how the completion of this project represents the fulfilment of a key part of her platform.

"I was elected by my peers at the school to be Co-Prime, and one of my promises that I had made was that I wanted to install a rainbow sidewalk at KCI," said McCorkindale. "I thought it would be a really good way of showcasing how everyone belongs at KCI."



Abbey Gingerich is a student activities advisor and teacher at KCI, and was beside McCorkindale throughout this project. She explained what it was like to be beside her as it was unveiled, especially as McCorkindale prepares to embark on the next step of her learning journey.

"We know how much thought and care went into the planning of the project," said Gingerich. "It's really special that she was able to come back before she goes on to her next adventure."



Laura McBride is a neighbourhood liaison with the City of Kitchener's Love My Hood team and was excited to see this project through. McBride, whose role was to support community members with finding funding and navigating the municipal processes, noted that it was the first project she's worked on with this level of student leadership.

"I believe strongly in youth voices, and I really wanted to see this project realized," said McBride.



As McCorkindale reflected on all that she'd learned through this experience, she saw countless ways that her well-honed leadership skills would be helpful, especially as she made the transition to continuing learning at the post-secondary level.

"Leadership is not just something that you do as a course in high school," she said. "It's something that's a lifelong process."

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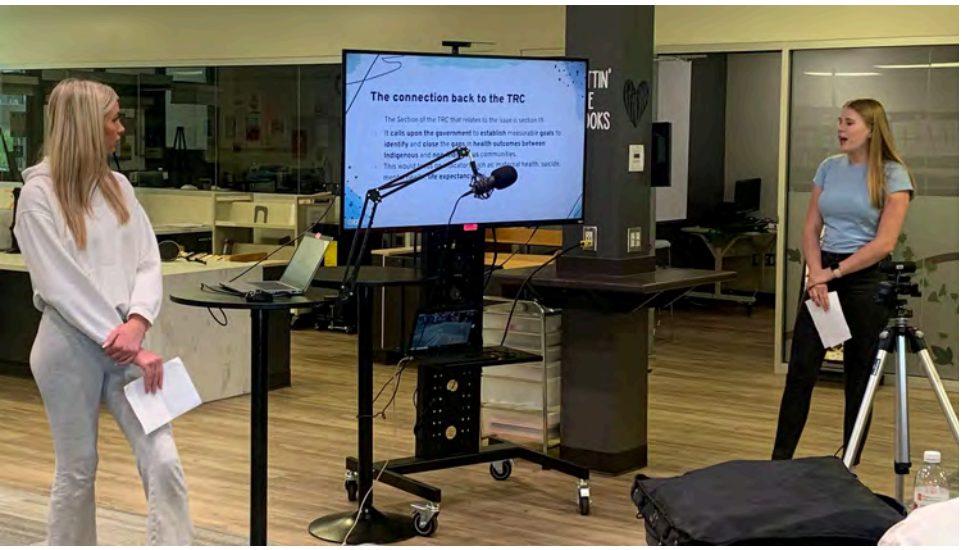
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WE ARE WRDSB




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

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