



REPORT TO

REGULAR BOARD

## STUDENT-LED COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY "PROMOTING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT"

"Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established." Proverbs 16:3

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Joel Ndongmi and Taylor Dallin, Student Trustees		

### RECOMMENDATION REPORT

**Vision:**

*At Toronto Catholic we transform the world through witness, faith, innovation and action.*

**Mission:**

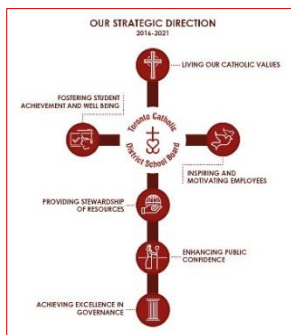
*The Toronto Catholic District School Board is an inclusive learning community uniting home, parish and school and rooted in the love of Christ.*

*We educate students to grow in grace and knowledge to lead lives of faith, hope and charity.*

Rory McGuckin  
Director of Education

D. Koenig  
Associate Director  
of Academic Affairs

L. Noronha  
Associate Director of Facilities,  
Business and Community  
Development, and  
Chief Financial Officer



## **A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Student Trustees implemented a collaborative inquiry with students in TCDSB secondary schools that receive the Urban Priority High School grant. The focus of the inquiry is centred on student engagement and leadership within a school community.

This report contains recommendations to the Director of Education and Senior Staff resulting from student responses from focus group discussions concentrating on school atmosphere and student wellbeing.

*The cumulative time required to prepare this report was 20 hours.*

## **B. PURPOSE**

1. To provide the Director and Senior Staff with recommendations that reflect student voice to be considered for implementation in future TCDSB strategic planning.
2. To identify factors that are seen by students as promoting student engagement and those that are perceived as challenges to participation and engagement in their community.
3. Through this collaborative inquiry, our goal was to encourage all students to become student leaders and change makers in their communities.

## **C. BACKGROUND**

1. In the past, Student Trustees collected data that reflected student voice through dialogue at the Catholic Student Leadership Impact Team (CSLIT) and Elementary Catholic Student Leadership Impact Team (ECSLIT) meetings. In order to reflect views of the TCDSB student community, Student Trustees began to consider alternate ways of collecting data that reflected a more diverse range of student voice.
2. Student Trustees met with the Director of Education in order to dialogue about the possibility of conducting a collaborative inquiry to reflect student voice.

3. Furthermore, Student Trustees then dialogued with the Research Department to determine the best process by which to collect data that would be more reflective of the diverse student body across the TCDSB.
4. It was decided to conduct focus group discussions with students from different communities across the city. Three schools were selected from each of the following areas: North York, Etobicoke, and East York.
5. Focus group discussions were preferred over surveys as they provided more of an opportunity for dialogue and clarification.
6. A project proposal, focus group discussion questions, and a research permission form were submitted to the Research Department for approval.
7. Student Trustees conducted three separate focus group discussions, one for each TCDSB secondary school. The focus group consisted of a mixed group grade 9 to 12 students. Discussions took place during the months of December to February.
8. During the focus group discussions, Student Trustees asked open-ended questions pertaining to school atmosphere and student wellbeing. See *Appendix A* for a list of the questions.

#### **D. EVIDENCE/RESEARCH/ANALYSIS**

1. During the focus group discussions, the Student Trustees and the CSLIT Director of Administrative Affairs took minutes of the focus group discussions.
2. While the questions pertained to school atmosphere and student wellbeing, concerns spanning different areas were also discussed by students. The Student Trustees decided to organize these concerns into the following categories: Student Wellbeing, Human Capital—Teachers in the Classroom, School Board Engagement with Students, Success in the Classroom, and Local Student Voice.

#### **CAPITAL REPAIRS:**

##### Student Summary:

- Many students have mentioned that their schools are in dire need of repair. Of special note was the negative effect of the school temperature (too cold or too warm) on the students.
- In terms of classroom resources, students mentioned that many of their textbooks are outdated which often puts them at a disadvantage over other schools that may have newer edition textbooks.

Student Trustees recommend that:

1. The Board consider allocating additional funds to classroom resources.
2. The Board consider allocating additional Capital or Renewal funds for heaters and air conditioning in schools.

**HUMAN CAPITAL—TEACHERS IN THE CLASSROOM**

Student Summary:

- Students mentioned that they have gone to great lengths to report situations where they feel that teachers are not meeting their unique learning needs or situations within the school where they are made to feel that the conditions are unsafe. They continuously advocate for some changes and do not see any success being realized or suggestions being implemented, despite the fact that they often amass large groups of fellow students in support of their cause.
- As of now, students are not aware of the options available to them in regards to reporting any specific issue(s) with school staff. Most students know that they can report it to the school Principal, but that is the full extent of their understanding on this specific matter.

Student Trustees recommend that:

1. Board staff increase communication with students regarding the availability of safe and welcoming procedures and processes for reporting on all issues pertaining to their safety and well-being of students.
2. The Board encourage schools to give students more attention and consideration when they report to the Administration that a teacher/member of staff is not addressing their concerns properly. Students want their concerns to be taken seriously by administrators, teachers and support staff.

**LOCAL STUDENT VOICE**

Summary:

- Students would like to have their voice incorporated in their local school operations.

- Through local student voice, students would have the opportunities to propose solutions that work for the unique circumstances of their school therefore enhancing overall satisfaction rates for students and staff.

Student Trustees recommend that:

1. The Board mandate that students have the opportunity to present student concerns to staff during staff meetings or at another appropriate venue.

## **STUDENT SUCCESS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM**

Student Summary:

- Students mentioned that it would be beneficial for their learning if they were contributing collaborators in helping organize and shape the assignments related to the course of study. Additionally, students mentioned that they would like to take more ownership of their own learning by being taught how to develop more effective time management skills.
- Students also discussed that they find that opportunities (such as volunteering and experiential learning opportunities) exist, but they are not advertised in a fulsome way to the entire student body, leading to students not being as engaged or involved in these opportunities as they could be.

Student Trustees recommend that:

1. The Board encourage schools to provide students to be collaborative contributors in the organization of their courses in order to better suit their pace and learning needs.
  - a. Students want to be engaged in helping develop the unit learning goals (School Effectiveness Framework) and co-constructing the success criteria for their learning.
2. TCDSB schools migrate towards a common platform (such as Google Classroom) for collaborating and sharing experiential learning and volunteering opportunities so that all students are aware of these initiatives.
3. The Board encourage secondary schools to hold time management workshops for high school students.
4. The Board make electronic equipment and Internet connections more accessible to students.
5. The Board explore increasing the number of practical and/or real world skills-based courses such as hairstyling, wood workshop, and sewing to further engage students in their learning.

Students ask the Board to continue:

- Encouraging teachers to continue to have learning goals visible in the classroom in order to direct student learning. Students find the posting of learning goals beneficial because they guide the learning experience.
- Encouraging experiential learning opportunities.
- Encouraging differentiated learning in order to meet the diverse learning styles in the classroom.
- Encouraging peer mentoring opportunities.

## **STUDENT WELLBEING**

### Student Summary:

- Over the course of the inquiry, students revealed insights into student wellbeing. Students mentioned that the workload of high school paired with home responsibilities can make for a stressful combination. School should provide supports for students to assist them in relieving these stressors in order to perform well not only in their academics but in their daily life.
- One of the factors that contributes to the stressful nature of high school is determining the appropriate pathway in regards to post-secondary ventures. Students have indicated that staff such as Guidance Counsellors and Child and Youth Workers (CYW) are helpful to them with regards to determining post-secondary opportunities.
- Furthermore, a factor in student wellbeing is a safe and inclusive environment. Our sample of students have mentioned that having an adult presence throughout the school building decreases the perceived likelihood of bullying in public spaces.

### Student Trustees recommend that:

1. The Board encourages schools to integrate spiritual mindfulness spaces such as meditation rooms.
2. The Board hire more guidance counsellor and Child and Youth Worker (CYW) positions in secondary schools.
3. The Board increase the number of student supervisor positions.
4. The Board work with the cafeteria vendors to make cafeteria food more affordable and accessible for all students.

### Student Trustees ask the Board to continue:

- Encouraging schools to have “buddy” and big brother/sister/peer mentoring programs.

- Encouraging breakfast program partnerships with the Angel Foundation for Learning (AFL).
- Supporting specialized extracurricular activities that engage our secondary students after school.
- Promoting the Anonymous Alerts App.

## **TCDSB STUDENT ENGAGEMENT**

### Student Summary:

- Students mentioned that they often see the Board as some distant entity that cannot be reached or accessed. This leads to feelings of helplessness when students want to bring up a specific concern or if they have an idea to improve their school experience. By providing opportunities for interaction, this school board would be ensuring that there is a commitment to break down some of those barriers and it would further enhance and promote student engagement.

### Student Trustees recommend that:

1. The Director of Education (in conjunction with the Student Trustees) put in place a Director's Student Voice Council. This group would meet quarterly and would be made up of members of the CSLIT Executive.
2. That the school board establish a direct line of communication (something of the nature of a virtual suggestion box) on the TCDSB website with the results being sent directly to the current Student Trustees and the Director of Education.
3. The Board encourage increased interaction between the student body, Trustees and Superintendents.

## **E. METRICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

1. The Student Trustees are going to establish a CSLIT Working Group comprised of students across the board who will be responsible for monitoring implementation of all of the actions recommended in this report.
2. The Student Trustees are currently exploring conducting a yearly student-led collaborative inquiry.
3. The Student Trustees will continue dialogue with the Research Department in regards to how this initiative can be expanded to ensure that the broad range of student voice present within the TCDSB is reflected in future planning.

## **F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

The Student Trustees recommend that that findings of this student-led collaborative inquiry be reviewed by the appropriate staff and be considered to inform future staff professional development and strategic planning to further promote student engagement within the TCDSB.