



REPORT TO

REGULAR BOARD

VOICES THAT CHALLENGE 2020 CSLIT – INSPIRING ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

So let a man think of us as Christ's servants, and stewards of God's mysteries. Here, moreover, it is required of stewards, that they be found faithful. (1 Corinthians 4:1-2)

Created, Draft	First Tabling	Review
September 21, 2020	October 15, 2020	Click here to enter a date.

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INFORMATION 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.



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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report shares student perspectives on how positive change can be made within the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) community and beyond. It identifies five key pillars that students have deemed important to take action. This report provides a vision for what the Student Trustees, the Catholic Student Leadership Impact Team (CSLIT) Executive, and the CSLIT General Assembly plan to work on during the upcoming academic year. It includes ideas and examples which address the recommendations brought forward by the outgoing CSLIT Executive Council and Student Trustee. In addition, it includes valuable student input pertaining to the implementation of social justice initiatives relevant to the selected pillars.

The cumulative staff time required to prepare this report was 40 hours.

B. PURPOSE

1. This report complies with the requirement of an annual report to the Board of Trustees normally based on CSLIT's "*Voices that Challenge*" conference which was unable to occur due to COVID-19 school closures.
2. The issues raised within the five pillars represent the collective voice of the students. The opportunity to present these concerns at the board level allows for direct involvement and needed dialogue regarding relevant issues that impact TCDSB students. During the first CSLIT online meeting of the year, held on Wednesday, September 9, 2020, participants were given the opportunity to provide input on last year's 5 pillars. The current student trustees will be seeking further clarification on these recommendations at the next general assembly virtual meeting on Tuesday, September 29, 2020. This strategy will better allow them to prioritize and clarify the recommendations in order to select what specific initiatives to focus on during their term.

C. BACKGROUND

1. Due to COVID-19, schools March break until the end of June, 2020, with Distance Learning in effect. This prevented the occurrence of CSLIT's annual *Voices that Challenge* conference. Normally, participants are able to provide input in regards to the current needs and priorities that students are

most passionate about. Unfortunately, due to school closures, this conference was not able to take place.

2. In addition, due to COVID-19, leaders from across the school board were unable to gather at Olympia Sports Camp this summer. Over the last 12 years, CSLIT has organized *Catholic Leadership Camp* at the end of August where students from every TCDSB high school are able to interact, collaborate, and share. It is also an opportunity for newly appointed CSLIT executives to further discuss what pillars should be focused on for the upcoming school year.
3. Rather than a retreat at Olympia Sports Camp, on Wednesday, September 2, 2020, our newly appointed 2020-2021 CSLIT Executive got together to review last year's pillars and action plans. Since many of the action plans were not able to be fully completed due to school closures, CSLIT Executive members agreed to continue focusing on the same pillars but to create new action plans that are more conducive to this year's educational climate.
4. On Wednesday, September 9, 2020, CSLIT held its first virtual online general assembly meeting of the year. This gave the student body an opportunity to provide input on this year's renewed pillars of focus.
5. The Student Trustees plan to present these recommendations to the entire CSLIT General Assembly at their next virtual meeting on Tuesday, September 29, 2020, so that a wider poll can be administered. This will be extremely useful in ensuring that the opinions brought forward during the 2019 "*Voices that Challenge*" conference are still relevant. After the opinions of the wider General Assembly are compiled, CSLIT Executive members will review the student ideas collected and prioritize various action items attributed to each pillar.
6. Pillars of focus and the action items associated with each pillar will be assigned to appropriate CSLIT Executive members and subcommittees so that action can be taken to make those visions a reality.
7. The practice of recommending initiatives from the "*Voices that Challenge*" conference through the outgoing Student Trustee and the previous CSLIT Executive Council to the incoming CSLIT Executive Council has become the adopted standard. This allows for the current Student Trustees and

CSLIT to build upon the success of last year's Council while working on any new priorities they feel are most relevant.

8. The current recommendations put forth by the 2020-2021 CSLIT Executive will be more successful with the assistance of different departments and appropriate staff.

D. EVIDENCE/RESEARCH/ANALYSIS

1. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on CSLIT's 2019-2020 recommended actions. The following is a brief summary of some of the work in which CSLIT was able to engage, as well as any cancellations that resulted:

Growing in Faith

- CSLIT Christmas Party collection of canned goods donated to the Good Shepherd
- CSLIT and ECSLIT (Elementary Catholic Student Leadership Impact Team) meeting donation collections scheduled for March and April were unfortunately cancelled due to school closures
- ECSLIT digital posters made to thank and support frontline workers
- Faith Camp cancelled due to school closures but were replaced with "Let's Talk Faith" webinars; 5 webinars were held from April to June, with a total of 1,132 student participants

Environmental Stewardship

- Meat free pizzas at all ECSLIT and CSLIT meetings (September to February) as well as at 4 iLITE (Intermediate Leaders in Training Event) elementary conferences
- Meatless Fridays - unable to execute due to school closures
- Continued promoting bottle-water free zones in all schools
- Stewardship action items highlighted at CSLIT President's Council
- CSLIT held a livestream Earth Day broadcast, celebrating the 50th anniversary of Earth Day on April 22, 2020, with 1,133 viewers,

Mental Health and Well Being

- Guest speakers at iLITE conferences, with approximately 2200 students in attendance
- Guest speakers invited for ECSLIT and CSLIT meetings

- Unable to host De-Stress Night which was scheduled for June before exam period

Multiculturalism and Indigenous Education

- CSLIT played a major role in organizing and hosting TCDSB's Newcomer Conference
- Anti-black Racism conference was cancelled due to school closures
- Indigenous Leadership program was cancelled due to school closures

Respecting Differences

- Inclusion and Belonging event scheduled for April was cancelled due to school closures
- Survey to determine if schools had a Respecting Differences club was not conducted
- Request for greater visible support for LGBTQ+ added to this year's action plan

2. On Wednesday, September 9, 2020, the CSLIT Executive Council agreed to develop specific action items related to selected student recommendations. The following is an action plan outlining the intended pillars of focus for the action plan "*CSLIT: Inspiring Active Citizenship in Catholic Education*." Note: the items listed are not necessarily in order of importance; CSLIT recognizes that the different action items listed below become a priority at different points in the school year.

CSLIT 2020-2021 Recommended Actions

1. Rooted in Christ - Growing in Faith

John 20:29 - "Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"

As Catholic student leaders, our faith needs to be at the forefront of everything we do. As leaders, we want to create opportunities for students to strengthen their connection with God, as well as grow in their Catholic faith.

As we enter the third year of the TCDSB's pastoral plan, we all strive to *become* more like Jesus and *become* one with Christ. Being a *discerning believer* is one of the important *Ontario Catholic Graduate Expectations*. Despite all of the hardships we have faced over the last year, we continue to stay *Rooted In Christ*, with the faith that we will all be cared for and supported by our Heavenly Father.

Since March, our CSLIT Faith subcommittee has been meeting on a bi-weekly basis to plan faith enriched online initiatives for TCDSB students. Building on last year's success, CSLIT will continue to host *Let's Talk Faith*, a monthly student lead spiritual reflection broadcasted on YouTube live. This allows for interaction, discussion, and prayer with Catholic student leaders and staff across the TCDSB. Supported by the TCDSB's Nurturing our Catholic Community Team, students will be exploring topics that deepen their faith and strengthen their relationships with God.

The Call to Family, Community and Participation is an important Catholic Social Teaching. As *Discerning Believers*, it is important not just to live in faith but to grow in faith. Last year, CSLIT wanted to expand *Faith Camp* from a one-day event to a 3-day program, but due to Covid-19, we were unable to host the event. This year, with the support of the Nurturing our Catholic Community Team, our CSLIT Executive Faith Representative would like to create a virtual Faith Camp experience. This initiative will allow participants to learn, ask questions, share, celebrate, and live out what it means to be Catholic.

Another way CSLIT plans on continuing to grow as discerning believers is through community outreach. Student leaders do not want to just talk about faith, they also want opportunities to put our faith into action. Outreach initiatives that assist those struggling and/or less fortunate (e.g. elderly, homeless, and individuals struggling with mental health) is where we will focus our attention. Outreach is proposed to happen once every 2 months over the course of the 2020-2021 school year. Initiatives can happen virtually or in-person (if permitted).

2. Mental Health and Well-Being

1 Peter 3, 15 - "In an age which seems more fearful of the future, we are directed to give an account of the hope that is within us."

Mental health and well-being refers to much more than the absence of mental illness, and plays a key role in a student's life. Mental health issues can occur at a very young age and affects a student's physical health, school success, and personal relationships.

As a Catholic school board, we must ensure that we prioritize the spiritual needs of a student's soul. The goal of being a *reflective, creative, and holistic thinker*, is difficult to achieve when one struggles with mental health. If we make our

community more aware of the difference between mental illness and mental health, then we can promote the idea of mental wealth.

We want to ensure that the needs of students with mental health struggles are heard. With the support of the TCDSB's Mental Health Services Department, the Mental Health and Well-Being subcommittee will create initiatives to address and educate other students about the stigmas that exist while publicizing available support.

CSLIT encourages the board to recognize September as Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. This is an important action plan, as it gives time for everyone to share resources and stories in order to shed light on this highly stigmatized topic.

Due to COVID-19, the Stop the Stigma conferences will more than likely not take place this school year. CSLIT would like to assist the Mental Health Services Department in the creation of a virtual version of this event.

CSLIT hopes to create a fundraiser which will benefit the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. Since the Angel Foundation for Learning collaborates with CAMH, there is an opportunity to create an initiative to help support both organizations.

3. Multiculturalism and Diversity Advocacy

Colossians 1:16-17 - "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

God has created each individual person in His likeness and image. We are called to celebrate our differences and live in harmony. As collaborative contributors, we need to ensure that we create environments that respect the rights of all students so that everyone feels a sense of dignity through the acceptance of self and others.

The immense diversity within the TCDSB makes our Board special and unique. Despite all of our racial and cultural differences, all students should feel proud of their heritage and feel comfortable sharing who they are and from where they come.

Students need the opportunity to celebrate their heritage as well as learn about other cultures. This needs to come from dialogue and education.

CSLIT wants to ensure that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) staff and students feel supported and represented. Our Board passed a motion regarding Anti-Black and Anti-Indigenous Racism and it is imperative that the Board follows through with all of the recommendations.

CSLIT encourages the Board to continue to promote and support the various heritage months throughout the school year and host monthly celebration events to embrace our various cultures. CSLIT would like to continue playing a big role in the Newcomer Student Leadership Conference hosted by the Equity and Diversity Department as well as the Anti-Black Racism Conference which had to be cancelled last year.

CSLIT wishes to hold a “Culture shock event” which would allow students to come together to celebrate their culture and heritage. Supported by the Equity and Diversity Department, the event would focus on learning about the history of other cultures and students will be encouraged to wear traditional clothing.

4. Indigenous Education

Isaiah 1:17 - “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.”

The history of the Indigenous peoples in Canada is rich and diverse. Students need to be educated on Indigenous history, so that they may truly understand their immense contribution to our great nation. The culture and history of the FNMI (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) is an integral part of Canadian history, and students need more opportunities to learn about this important part of being Canadian.

In order to follow the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectation of being *an effective communicator*, we must first seek to understand. Awareness is the first step to restoring dignity to Canada’s FNMI community. Students need more opportunities to get educated about the mistreatment of our Indigenous people.

We ask the TCDSB to better emphasize the importance behind Orange Shirt Day, and to truly dig deep on the meaning behind this event. We need to go

beyond just wearing an orange shirt and delve deeper into “why” this day has been designated. Doing so will give students better understanding why they are participating.

Many students are unaware that June is Indigenous Heritage Month. Schools may need to greater emphasize celebrating the Indigenous culture during this month. In collaboration with the appropriate staff, such as with the Equity and Diversity Department, CSLIT would like to help develop a “turn key” resource that schools can use to implement a rich and engaging month of fun and educational activities.

Due to COVID-19, the annual Indigenous Leadership Program which runs in May is in jeopardy of running again this year. In order to continue to provide this rich Indigenous education, CSLIT and ESCLIT meetings will invite guests that can educate our students about Indigenous culture.

5. Respecting Differences, Inclusion and Belonging for our LGBTQ+ Community

Mark 12:31 - “The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

In order to foster a safe and inclusive space within our community, it is important to respect the differences of others. We are all beautiful in the eyes of God, and we should love one another for who we are.

The Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectation of being a *caring family member* encourages us to be loving and welcoming to everyone, despite the differences in sexual attraction and gender identification. It calls on teachers, students, and parents to respect one another, so that a safe and inclusive environment is present. Catholic schools should continue to nurture a discrimination-free climate that allows students to be in a space where they can genuinely express themselves without being afraid.

We want students to know that they are not alone. With the support of the Equity and Diversity Department, and the Nurturing our Catholic Community Team, one way to achieve this is to invite a Catholic keynote speaker to dialogue with TCDSB students, one who has experience working with youth and who understands the hardships and struggles that are faced when it comes to accepting oneself. This may help students release their fears and feel more comfortable about expressing their genuine selves.

CSLIT invites the TCDSB to explore the development of safe and inclusive forums where students can share their perspective with respect to LGBTQ+ topics without fear of ridicule or reprisal. Moderated by staff, information gathered and analysed will help inform future practice and decision making based on student voice.

The TCDSB is also invited to develop a communication strategy to ensure students are aware of protocols around voicing local concerns, so that they can be addressed in a timely fashion by the appropriate staff.

Finally, CSLIT encourages the TCDSB to follow suit with other Catholic boards that have proactively found ways to visibly show the acceptance of LGBTQ+ students within the Catholic community. Not all LGBTQ+ students feel accepted within the Catholic community. If the Board's goal is to create safe and inclusive schools, we need to acknowledge that more needs to be done to support our LGBTQ+ community.

Additional Board Support

1. The goal is to have every TCDSB secondary school represented at our CSLIT monthly meetings (virtual or face to face). We ask that each area superintendent takes the initiative to reach out to each of their secondary schools to ensure their area is properly represented.
2. The goal is to have a minimum of 8 new schools join ECSLIT. We ask that each area superintendent takes the initiative to reach out to each of their elementary schools to invite them to participate in ECSLIT events.

E. METRICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Students should be motivated to create positive change in the world and not ignore any form of injustice. Students feel a calling to live out their faith; as such, involvement in social justice actions allows them to make their faith more visible. The current Student Trustees will be engaging the CSLIT Executive and relevant subcommittees so that they can work with various staff members to address their specific recommendations. Students feel that

Board policies must include student voice and perspective when addressing current and relevant local and global issues.

2. The Student Trustees and CSLIT will report annually to the Board on the impact of their initiatives.

F. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

This report is for the consideration of the Board.