



REPORT TO

REGULAR BOARD

VOICES THAT CHALLENGE 2021 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
October 12, 2021	October 21, 2021	Click here to enter a date.

K. Baybayon, Student Trustee, CSLIT Co-Chair
S. De Castro, Student Trustee, CSLIT Co-Chair
M. Consul, Catholic Student Leadership Resource Teacher
M. Caccamo, Superintendent of NCC, Safe Schools, Cont. Ed., St. Anne Catholic Academy

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.



Brendan Browne, PhD
Director of Education

A. Della Mora
Associate Director of Academic
Affairs and
Chief Operating Officer

D. Boyce
Associate Director of
Facilities, Business and
Community Development

R. Putnam
Chief Financial Officer and
Treasurer

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 relevant and important. 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 outgoing Student Trustee. In addition, it includes valuable student input pertaining to the implementation of social justice initiatives addressing the needs associated with each selected pillar.

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 based on CSLIT's "*Voices that Challenge*" conference which took place virtually on March 5th, 2021.
2. The areas of focus raised within the five pillars represent the collective voice of the students across the board. 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 Tuesday, September 28, 2021, participants were given the opportunity to express which school issues they are most passionate about. Students were then given the opportunity to rank which issues they feel need the most attention and action. This strategy allows the Student Trustees to prioritize and clarify student recommendations in order to select what specific initiatives to focus on during their term.

C. BACKGROUND

1. Due to COVID-19, we were prevented from hosting CSLIT's annual *Voices that Challenge* conference in-person, however, a virtual conference was held on Friday, March 5, 2021. One thousand six hundred thirteen (1613)

TCDSB students attended this virtual conference. At this event, students were given the opportunity to fill out an online survey which asked, what social justice issues do you feel are most relevant to students. Participants were also invited to give ideas on how to address their most important social justice issues.

2. 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 a *Catholic Leadership Camp* at the end of August where students from every TCDSB high school are able to interact, collaborate, and discuss the survey results from the Voices that Challenge conference. This summer overnight excursion also allows the newly appointed CSLIT Executive to further analyse the student voice collected from the Voices that Challenge conference and discuss what pillars should be focused on for the upcoming school year.
3. Rather than a summer retreat at Olympia Sports Camp, on Friday, September 10, 2021, our newly appointed 2021-2022 CSLIT Executive met to review last year's pillars and action plans. The CSLIT Executive members participated in very insightful discussions and started brainstorming possible ideas for this year, building upon last year's success.
4. On Tuesday, September 28, 2021, CSLIT held its first virtual online general assembly meeting of the year. The CSLIT Executive surveyed the CSLIT general assembly for their input surrounding common issues students often face and used this feedback to create new action plans that may be more conducive to this year's educational climate. This gave the student body an opportunity to provide input on what they think this year's pillars of focus should be.
5. The Student Trustees and CSLIT Executive reviewed the results from September 28, 2021. The general assembly's input was extremely useful in ensuring that the opinions brought forward during the 2021 "*Voices that Challenge*" conference are still relevant. CSLIT Executive members reviewed the student ideas collected and prioritized various action items attributed to each pillar based on survey results.
6. The 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 Executive to build upon the success of last year’s Executive while working on any new priorities they feel are most relevant.
8. The current recommendations put forth by the 2021-2022 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 last year’s CSLIT 2020-2021 recommended actions. The following is a summary of some of the work that CSLIT was able to complete last year, as well as any cancellations that resulted due to the pandemic.

Growing in Faith

- CSLIT was able to continue to host *Let’s Talk Faith*, a monthly student-led spiritual online reflection and conversation broadcasted on YouTube live. This monthly event created interaction, discussion, and an opportunity to experience communal prayer with Catholic student leaders and staff from across the TCDSB. Supported by the TCDSB Nurturing our Catholic Community Team, students explored and discussed various topics that helped deepen their faith and understanding, as well as strengthen their relationship with God. Topics and activities included:
 - Various guest speakers:
 - Scientist from Cornell University
 - Chaplain from the University of Toronto
 - TCDSB high school chaplains and teachers
 - The role of young leaders in the Bible
 - Bible Trivia
 - Sharing personal stories of faith

Last year, with the support of the Nurturing our Catholic Community Team, our CSLIT Executive Director of Faith created a virtual *Faith Camp*

experience. This initiative occurred over two days and allowed participants to learn, ask questions, share, celebrate, and live out what it means to be Catholic. Students from across the TCDSB were able to come together to participate in many faith-based activities and discussions which included:

- The link between science and faith
- Exploring ways to put your faith into action
- Q&A with Father Damian Young-Sam-You
- Making rosaries
- Bible Trivia
- Communal prayers
- Praise and worship

For every CSLIT and Catholic Student Leadership event, the CSLIT faith committee wrote, organized, and led opening prayers, closing prayers and intentions.

Multiculturalism and Diversity Advocacy

- CSLIT encouraged 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 established new student groups: the *Catholic Youth Black Alliance (CYBA)* and the *Asian Core Team*. These groups helped plan many of the initiatives described below.
- CSLIT created a new clothing line called *Teach Peace Era*, which raised money for various multi-cultural charities.
- CSLIT assisted with the *Newcomer Conference*. Our leaders helped emcee the event, host workshops, and assisted newcomer students in creating videos submission for the Newcomer video contest.
- CSLIT played a significant role in the Anti-Racism conference organized by the Community Relations department. During this 2-day event, The CSLIT Director of Equity was the keynote speaker. In addition, members of CSLIT's Equity committee helped facilitate workshops during the event.
- CSLIT hosted an online weekly talk show called "The Focus" which featured prominent leaders within the community of diverse backgrounds.

These leaders shared their lived experiences and tips on how to navigate around and through existing systemic barriers. Guests included teachers, police officers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, business owners, and various alumni.

- CSLIT hosted 5 Black History month virtual board wide presentations offered to students in grades 7 to 12. Each session focused on different topics related to the black community and the celebration of African heritage.
- During Black History Month, CSLIT hosted an online event called *Hear Me Out* where a panel of successful TCDSB professionals talked to youth about the similar struggles they faced growing up and how they overcame these barriers.
- CSLIT hosted an online event entitled *Culture Shock*, where students from different backgrounds got together to dialogue about what makes their culture unique and celebrate the commonalities between us all.
- CSLIT hosted an *Asian Awareness* webinar where students discussed topics like Asian stereotypes, systemic Asian barriers, and the concept of a “model minority”. Students were able to dialogue with staff and each other to discuss ways to address these topics relevant to Asian students.

Mental Health and Well Being

- Due to COVID-19, the *Stop the Stigma* conferences were held virtually this year. CSLIT helped create videos to promote mental health and well being.
- CSLIT conducted a fundraiser which was donated to CAMH, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.
- At the end of each CSLIT and ECSLIT monthly meeting, we held online guided meditation sessions for students who needed an outlet to relax or destress.
- At the *Voices that Challenge* conference and *iLITE* Conferences, CSLIT helped organize many workshop presenters that focused on the topic of mental well-being.

- CSLIT hosted monthly *Zen-Doodle* gatherings where students from different schools gathered to meditate via art. During these guided art exercises, students had the opportunity to talk, socialize, have fun, and retreat for 90 minutes to enjoy peace and positive conversation.
- It is important to note that many students commented that due to extra-curriculars being cancelled, CSLIT and ECSLIT events were things they extremely looked forward to participating in which helped balance school life and contributed to good mental health. For many students, it was their only social outlet outside of class time since sports, clubs, and excursions were cancelled due to COVID-19.

Indigenous Education and Immersion

- CSLIT recommended that the TCDSB should find ways to better educate students on the importance and origin of Orange Shirt Day and to truly dig deep on the meaning behind this event. Many students we polled said they had a better understanding of the significance of the day, more so than any other year.
- Unfortunately, due to the pandemic, our *Indigenous Leadership Program* and Immersion to Manitoulin Island had to be cancelled for a second year.
- Indigenous leaders were highlighted within our ECSLIT meetings as well as the origin and importance of Orange Shirt Day.
- We invited an Indigenous elder to speak at *Let's Talk Faith* webinar to educate students on Indigenous traditions and the commonalities with the Catholic faith.

Respecting Differences, Inclusion and Belonging

- On a motion of the Board of Trustees, CSLIT established the first ever 2SLGBTQ+ Student Committee. This committee welcomed all members of the community and allies to come together monthly to plan different initiatives that can help promote awareness and education at the board and school level.
- CSLIT hosted a 2SLGBTQ+ webinar. TCDSB students were able to come together to learn more about the community and ways in which they can be

allies to their friends and family. We covered many crucial topics, such as the differences between gender identity and gender expression, terms and definitions, tackling stigmas and misconceptions, as well as showing respect towards others.

- CSLIT advocated to have the Pride Flag flown at the CEC and all TCDSB schools as well as acknowledging June as Pride Month. We are proud to see the board's journey in showing acceptance and inclusion towards our 2SLGBTQ+ students and staff.

Other Catholic Student Leadership Initiatives

- CSLIT hosted an online webinar called *Cash Money Class*. Based on student requests, the need to have a financial literacy initiative was expressed by many students. Guest speakers included a professional financial planner who spoke about the power of saving early, taxes, and investments.
 - *President's Council* is an event CSLIT hosts annually where student council members from each Catholic secondary school come together to network and share best practices.
 - *Voices that Challenge* is our annual CSLIT conference. Last year it was held online with all TCDSB high schools, and 1613 students were in attendance. Students enjoyed various keynote speakers, workshops, and an inter-school talent showcase.
 - *SMILE Camp* was run virtually last year at both the elementary and secondary level. Students at SMILE Camp identified high priority needs within their community and created action plans to address those needs after 3 days of leadership training.
2. Every high school was represented at the *Voices That Challenge* online conference on March 5, 2021. As mentioned, 1613 high school students were in attendance. Each student was invited to complete a survey asking them to name two social justice issues they are passionate about that they would like to see the board focus on an address.
 3. Twenty-nine different topics were brought forth by our students on the *Voices that Challenge* survey. From the twenty-nine topics, we compiled

and presented the ten most frequent topics before the CSLIT General Assembly and asked them to select their top 5 priorities.

4. After getting the input from the CSLIT General Assembly, the CSLIT Executive Council reviewed the collected data and developed 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.
5. In years past we had a *Growing in Faith* and an *Environmental Stewardship* were two pillars of focus. To explore new topics, we will ensure that elements of our faith and sustainable earth friendly practices will be incorporated into all the 5 pillars below.

CSLIT 2021-2022 Recommended Actions

1. Supporting Students with Special Needs

Psalm 139: 14 “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

As Children of the Light, it is important we recognize that we are all unique and possess different talents and qualities given by God. To ensure our Catholic Student body continues to uphold a welcoming school environment, we must support our peers with special needs and students in Special Education programs. Regardless of exceptionality, every student should have access to leadership opportunities at the school and board level.

CSLIT wants to eliminate barriers that can be found in classroom and social settings that can often restrict our peers with exceptionalities from participating. We want to enhance opportunities given to our students in Special Education, and promote greater participation in Catholic Student Leadership events. In addition, CSLIT will place a greater emphasis and focus on ensuring all activities and opportunities planned are accessible to all participants, including those with special needs.

The Catholic Graduate Expectations call on us to be responsible citizens who give witness to Catholic social teaching by promoting peace, justice and the

sacredness of human life. CSLIT acknowledges our responsibility as Catholic citizens to leave no peer by oneself. We can accomplish this by being more mindful about the types of initiatives we create and the types of activities we organize within our programs.

This year CSLIT hopes to be able to bring back the TCDSB Special Olympics in May. Members of our General Assembly traditionally play a significant role in planning and executing this event. If pandemic restrictions continue, we will look to a virtual alternative.

Every month, members of the CSLIT Executive will be challenged to personally invite designated members of their school community to participate in our monthly meetings. This will include grade 9 students, newcomers, as well as students within special needs. CSLIT strives to expand the demographic of students that attend Catholic Student Leadership events.

When sending out official invites to Catholic Student Leadership programs, we will encourage teachers to include students with special needs as part of their delegation.

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 refer 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 CSLIT Mental Health and Well-Being subcommittee will create initiatives to address and educate students about the stigmas that exist surrounding mental illness, while publicizing the supports available to all students.

Spreading awareness is a key component to reducing the stigma around mental health. This is why we will designate one monthly CSLIT meeting to focus on mental health. At this meeting we will invite mental health professionals to speak to our general assembly focusing on ways to de-stress and relax as well as informing our students about available outlets if one needs support. Mental Health workshops at Camp Olympia and Voices that Challenge will also be organized to help spread education and awareness.

Exam time is a very stressful period for high school students. We plan to create small events prior to exam period which will give students the opportunity to disconnect for a short period of time and to take their minds off what might be causing them stress or anxiety. We will brainstorm with the board's mental health team to organize meaningful and effective programs that promote mental health and balance.

CSLIT plans to play an even bigger role with the board's Stop the Stigma conference this year by forming a student mental health subcommittee that will liaise with our board's mental health staff.

3. Enhancing Equity

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 our racial and cultural differences, all students should feel proud of their heritage and feel comfortable sharing who they are and from where their family originates.

After every CSLIT monthly meeting we will be collecting demographic data to track which pockets of the student body are participating. Using that

information, we will target and promote our upcoming events to a demographic of students underrepresented in previous events. This year we have 4 co-directors of public relations, each is assigned 2 superintendencies. This new structure will help us to better publicize our initiatives to a broader audience.

We will build on the success of last year's newly formed *Catholic Youth Black Alliance* and *Asian Core Team*. These two student groups will be brainstorming ideas for new events that focus on awareness, education, and equity.

CSLIT will continue working closely with the Community Relations Department and superintendent of Equity to support events such as the Newcomer Conference, Anti-Racism Conference, African Heritage Month initiatives, and Proudly Pinoy. CSLIT leaders are also very interested in supporting new initiatives we have never been involved with before.

4. Indigenous Education and Immersion

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 component of Canadian history, and students need more opportunities to learn about this important part of being Canadian.

In order to meet 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 be educated about the mistreatment of Indigenous people.

CSLIT is interested in collaborating with the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT). The NCCT provides numerous programs for Indigenous people (children, youth & adults) across Toronto. Programs include, the Seven Grandfather Teachings, Indigenous Innovations and Contributions to the World, Clan Systems, and Medicine Wheel Teachings. These are programs in which our student leaders would be interested in participating. CSLIT can help plan the facilitation of these programs with the assistance of the Indigenous resource staff at the board.

CSLIT plans to conduct various fundraising opportunities to support Indigenous communities. Hopefully with the reinstatement of excursions and overnight trips, the week-long *Indigenous Leadership Program* in Manitoulin Island can occur this year. CSLIT fundraising efforts would be given directly to the communities we will be visiting during our week-long immersion.

One monthly CSLIT meeting will be designated to Indigenous education. At this meeting, we will have an Indigenous guest speaker, as well as activities that teach us about Indigenous culture and heritage.

5. 2SLGBTQ+ Inclusion and Acceptance

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

To foster a safe and inclusive space within the TCDSB, 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 fear of ridicule or discrimination.

CSLIT encourages the TCDSB to continue the momentum created last year with the recognition of June as Pride Month and raising the Pride Flag.

CSLIT will continue the 2SLGBTQ+ Student Advisory Committee to help plan events and initiatives that focus on inclusion and belonging of all students. This committee will continue the groundwork laid by last year’s group that included:

a) The development of a safe, inclusive, online forum where students can share their experiences with respect to 2SLGBTQ+ 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.

- b) The creation of a TCDSB symbol of support that students can voluntarily wear or display to show their acceptance and solidarity with the 2SLGBTQ+ community.
- c) The organization of an *Inclusion and Belonging* retreat for members of the community and its allies to discuss topics important to the 2SLGBTQ+ student community.

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, we would like to invite a Catholic guest speaker familiar with the 2SLGBTQ+ community to dialogue with TCDSB students, a speaker who has experience working with youth and who understands the hardships and struggles that are faced when it comes to self-acceptance. This may help students release their fears and feel more comfortable about expressing their genuine selves.

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 all area Superintendents take the initiative to reach out to each of their secondary schools to encourage them to participate in our CSLIT monthly meetings. Monthly attendance can be provided to area superintendents to monitor if their region is being properly represented.
2. The goal is to have a minimum of 16 new elementary schools join ECSLIT. That is 2 new schools from each superintendency. We ask that all area superintendents take the initiative to reach out to each of their secondary schools to encourage them to participate in our ECSLIT monthly meetings. Monthly attendance can be provided to area superintendents to monitor if their region is being properly represented.

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. CONCLUDING STATEMENT

This report is for the information of the Board.