



REPORT TO

REGULAR BOARD

CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE: CLOSING THE LEARNING OPPORTUNITY GAP

*“THEN THE RIGHTEOUS WILL ANSWER HIM, ‘LORD, WHEN DID WE SEE YOU HUNGRY AND FEED YOU, OR THIRSTY AND GIVE YOU SOMETHING TO DRINK? WHEN DID WE SEE YOU A STRANGER AND INVITE YOU IN, OR NEEDING CLOTHES AND CLOTHE YOU? WHEN DID WE SEE YOU SICK OR IN PRISON AND GO TO VISIT YOU?’ THE KING WILL REPLY, ‘TRULY I TELL YOU, WHATEVER YOU DID FOR ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF MINE, YOU DID FOR ME.’”
MATTHEW 25:37-40*

*AMONG OUR TASKS AS WITNESSES TO THE LOVE OF CHRIST IS THAT OF GIVING A VOICE TO THE CRY OF THE POOR.
POPE FRANCIS (ADDRESS TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, JUNE 2013)*

Created, Draft	First Tabling	Review
June 1, 2017	June 15, 2017	Click here to enter a review date

Nick D’Avella, Superintendent of Student Success
Agatha-Julia Nemes, Coordinator II, Human Resources
Marina Vanayan, Senior Coordinator, Educational Research

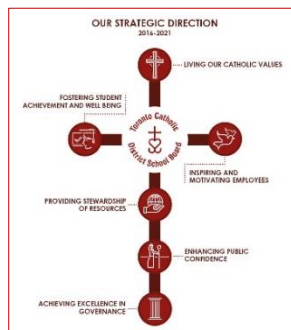
INFORMATION REPORT

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.



Angela Gauthier
Director of Education

R. McGuckin
Associate Director
of Academic Affairs

A. Sangiorgio
Associate Director
of Planning and Facilities

C. Jackson
Executive Superintendent
of Business Services and
Chief Financial Officer

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 rooted in the love of Christ. We educate students to grow in grace and knowledge and to lead lives of faith, hope and charity.

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report summarizes the progress made by the Catholic Social Justice Committee since its report to the Student Achievement and Well-Being Committee on September 11, 2014, and updates the work undertaken in the 2016-2017 school year. The committee implemented its *Spotlight Schools Initiative* in 12 schools across the TCDSB, with a focus on mitigating the effects of poverty and the impact on the learning opportunity gap. Supports were offered in professional learning opportunities, partnerships, and parental and parish engagement.

The cumulative staff time required for the preparation for this report was 15 hours.

B. PURPOSE

To provide an update on the work of the Catholic Social Justice Community Advisory Committee into the 2016-2017 school year.

C. BACKGROUND

1. **September 5, 2013** – the mandate of the *Catholic Social Justice Community Advisory Committee* approved by Board on is ‘to advise the Board on Policies, Programs and Services, which close the learning opportunity gap for school communities through the lens of Catholic Social Teaching.’
2. **September 11, 2014** - at the Student Achievement and Well-Being Committee on, a recommendation report, “Closing the Learning Opportunities Gap”, was presented, moved by Trustee Davis (seconded by Trustee D’Amico) and passed. The report included the following recommendations:
 - i. *That the TCDSB develops professional learning opportunities for staff to meet on a regular basis and interact with community partners with the view to learning how best to close the learning opportunity gap.*
 - ii. *That the TCDSB continue to further develop the school-parish connection as a welcoming community hub for families.*

iii. That a communication plan be developed to disseminate the good news story to the wider community.

3. The Catholic Social Teachings of the Church have been foundational to our understanding of learning opportunity. Catholic Social Teachings include: human dignity, rights and responsibilities, peace, preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, solidarity, common good, role of government, stewards of creation, dignity of work, and participation (subsidiarity).

D. EVIDENCE/RESEARCH/ANALYSIS

1. As a working definition, the **learning opportunity gap** was defined as: the gap in opportunity for learning that our most advantaged students (and communities) have over our least advantaged. Through dialogue and learning during its first year, the committee determined that within our school communities, learning opportunity gaps may exist in multiple domains: social, emotional, spiritual, health, physical, linguistic, cultural, academic, and economic.
2. TCDSB schools have access to a variety of data about students and school communities to help identify learning needs. The school learning and improvement cycle requires that all schools collaboratively review the evidence and create a School Learning Improvement Plan (SLIP) to guide the work in support of student achievement and well-being. The TCDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP) and the Board Learning Improvement Plan (BLIP) are foundational to all school planning.
3. Data sources are comprehensive and address aspects in all domains for example, academic, cultural-linguistic, economic, social-emotional. These include **achievement data** from Ministry assessments (e.g., EQAO); **demographic data** from Statistics Canada (e.g., median family income); **perceptual data** from student surveys (e.g., Safe and Caring Catholic School Climate Survey).
4. While the wealth of data available to schools is helpful to inform planning, there is much complexity to understanding learning opportunity gaps. As our school communities often represent a wide range of needs both within and across domains, an in-depth, holistic consideration of multiple sources of

information, both quantitative and qualitative, is required of School Improvement Teams to reflect the unique challenges of each school community.

Identifying poverty mitigation to address learning opportunity gaps

5. Following extensive discussions in committee, the consideration of feedback from schools, and the review of literature, the committee decided to focus on one important learning opportunity gap, namely, poverty.
6. Poverty is a reality for 1 in 3 children in Toronto and affects an estimated 30,000 Toronto Catholic District School Board students. Research has shown that poverty can have long-lasting and devastating effects on students and their families, including impact that is physiological, social, emotional, and academic.
7. Having identified poverty as a central theme, the committee agreed that the approach to be adopted needs to be actionable, sustainable, and scalable. The following documents were considered foundational to our understanding:
 - *Closing the Achievement Gap (Ontario Leadership Strategy, 2012)*
 - *Poverty and Schools in Ontario: How Seven Elementary Schools Are Working to Improve Education (ETFO, 2011)*
 - *Possibilities: Addressing Poverty in Elementary Schools (ETFO, 2012)*
 - *Engaging Students with Poverty in Mind (Eric Jensen, 2013)*
8. There are many programs, services, resources and practices used by TCDSB schools that can help to address learning opportunity gaps. These include programs developed by the school (e.g., after-school tutoring), those facilitated centrally (e.g., Angel Foundation for Learning), and those offered through the community (e.g., Parenting and Family Literacy Centres, Ontario Early Years Centres, newcomer services).

E. ACTION PLAN

1. In 2016-2017, the committee implemented the *Spotlight Schools Initiative* featuring professional learning, partnerships, and parental and parish engagement to address poverty in 12 schools.

2. The initiative was built on the following research-informed themes: teacher inquiry, school leadership, community connections, school climate and culture. All these themes support an approach that is “*good for all, necessary for some*”. The committee recognizes the importance of respect, sensitivity and avoiding a deficit-based approach as critical in supporting our students and families living in poverty.
3. For sustainability, during the first year of the initiative, 9 elementary schools and 3 secondary schools were selected, (one school per Ward). This representation is intended to help to build capacity across all schools in our Board. Learning could be shared at Principal meetings and lay the foundations for possible future expansion of the *Spotlight Schools Initiative*.
4. The following criteria were used for school selection:
 - a) affected by poverty;
 - b) demonstrated need in terms of EQAO achievement;
 - c) administration and staff who are willing and welcoming partners.
5. It is recognized that there is no “one size fits all” solution which will mitigate the effects of poverty across all TCDSB schools. The most effective solutions will be locally-based and representative of the community and the school. Administrators, staff, and parents will all be encouraged to share their ideas and to work together to improve student achievement and well-being. Stakeholder buy-in and ownership are cornerstones to ensuring sustainability of the *Spotlight Schools Initiative*.
6. School selection process included:
 - Step 1: For each TCDSB school, we reviewed the following data: demographic data from Statistics Canada (e.g., median family income) and achievement data (e.g., EQAO). Based on this information, we identified a potential list of schools (40 elementary and 8 secondary) that met the requirements.
 - Step 2: The list of potential schools was presented at Education Council on May 16, 2016. Superintendents were asked to provide input with regard to

supports and initiatives that may already be taking place in the school to avoid duplication.

- Step 3: Conversations with each Superintendent took place regarding which schools would best qualify at this time. One school in each of our 12 Wards was selected. The 3 secondary schools are *St Basil-the-Great, Jean Vanier* and *St Mary Catholic Academy*. The 3 elementary schools are *St Dorothy, St Leo, St Jane Frances, St Thomas Aquinas, Our Lady of Victory, St Columba, St Paul, Our Lady of Guadalupe* and *St Nicholas*.
- Step 4: Conversations took place with each Trustee to describe the initiative and school selection process.
- Step 5: Principals for the 12 schools were contacted and preliminary discussions about the initiative began.
- Step 6: On October 25, 2016, a meeting of the *Spotlight Schools* principals was held to share an outline of the initiative. Networking opportunities were offered and feedback on unique school needs was elicited.

7. Keeping student achievement and well-being at the core, the *Spotlight Schools Initiative* focused on 3 Ps of support:

Professional Learning:

- engage the schools in identifying critical learning needs;
- offer professional development opportunities for staff and administrators within an assets-based approach to understanding poverty and its effects;
- encourage staff to implement strategies that are effective, pedagogically sound, and culturally relevant, to close the learning opportunity gap.

Partnership:

- connect schools with the TCDSB Partnership Department to identify grant opportunities;
- encourage awareness of supports such as the Angel Foundation for Learning;
- investigate community-based supports facilitated by the city of Toronto (e.g., free dental care, low cost food options) and the Province of Ontario (e.g., Early Years Centres).

Parental and Parish Engagement

- engage parents in authentic decision-making opportunities; ensure that their voices are heard and honoured;
- connect families to their children’s schools through meaningful dialogue;
- liaise with the priest to encourage parish participation.

8. Key resources used in the *Spotlight Initiative* included:

Toronto

- *The Hidden Epidemic: A Report on Child and Family Poverty in Toronto* (2014)
- *TO Prosperity: Toronto Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2015-2018*
- *Divided City: Life in Canada’s Child Poverty Capital* (2016)

Ontario

- *Realizing Our Potential: Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy 2014-2019*
- *What Works? Research into Practice: Poverty and Schooling: Where Mindset Meets Practice* (Ministry of Education, 2015)
- *What Works? Research into Practice: Bringing Marginalized Parents and Caregivers into Their Children’s Schooling* (Ministry of Education, 2012)
- *Capacity Building Series K-12: Parent Engagement* (Ministry of Education 2012)

Other

- *Ten Opportunities: Practical Ideas for Supporting Students and Their Families Living in Poverty* (TCDSB, 2014)
- *A Journey of Hope: Understanding Poverty in Our Catholic Schools* (TCDSB, 2014).

F. METRICS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

During the 2016-2017 school year, the Catholic Social Justice Community Advisory Committee met 4 times to monitor and discuss the ongoing implementation of the *Spotlight Schools Initiative*.

As of June 2017:

- five of the schools availed themselves of offered **professional learning** opportunities (including staff PD and principal participation in an Early Years symposium)
- all 12 schools applied for **partnership** grants addressing a range of needs unique to schools (e.g., learning technology, literacy, nutrition, arts, capital, physical activity, enrichment opportunities and mental health)
- 10 schools were successful in securing grants (totalling approximately \$95,000) with the support of the Partnership Department
- as this is the *Year of the Parish* as per the Pastoral, many of the schools were already involved in enhancing **parish-school** connection and engagement
- a **year-end survey** was sent to the participating schools to garner feedback to inform next steps

G. CONCLUDING STATEMENT

This report is for the consideration of the Board.