

Student Leadership: The K-12 Catholic Family

About the project ...

The *Student Leadership* project evolved from events such as *Challenge Day* and *Rachel's Challenge* that the board's secondary schools hosted near the beginning of the school year. To build on these days, a K–12 leadership team was established with the goal of spreading the valuable learning and leadership from these days throughout the entire system. To achieve this goal, the team focused on the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations and the qualities of exceptional Catholic student leaders, with the purpose of empowering student voice in all schools in the board. Following secondary student attendance at the *Challenge Days*, elementary and secondary student leaders attended a *Catholic Student Leadership Forum* where they designed an interactive, multimedia presentation for Grade 6, 7 and 8 students that they then co-facilitated in each elementary school. Learning Coordinators also visited each elementary and secondary school to listen to student voice and encourage schools to spread the message about its importance and power for all students in their schools. Additional events were held during Catholic Education Week, culminating with a board-wide food drive called *Stuff that Bus!*, which involved all students and teachers in the system.

Impact on student learning and school culture ...

- Students were challenged to think about decision-making, problem-solving, creative and critical thinking and the impact that their decisions have on others. This translated into improved student learning and emphasized life-long learning skills for the 21st Century.
- The emphasis on Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations promoted high levels of achievement for all students as they conducted themselves in positive, respectful ways. This led to improved work habits, confidence and learning skills, and the resulting improvements to school and classroom culture had a direct impact on student learning and achievement.
- The unique and differentiated approach to each school presentation reinforced the literacy, Arts and technology skills that students were working on in their classrooms, which was a powerful model for classroom instruction and supported secondary students' future pathways.

Lessons learned for moving forward ...

- The project led to a growing realization that everyone in the board is part of one big K–12 family with each person supporting the others. When students identify with this bigger picture, they are attentive to the needs of other students and adults, which in turn has an impact on inclusion and bullying reduction. In addition, when students in elementary schools see themselves as extensions of secondary schools, smooth transitions throughout the grades are facilitated. This K–12 family model will be used as a foundation to build future events and student leadership forums.
- Students and staff became more familiar with the Ontario Catholic Graduate Expectations, and more importantly, students learned how to put them into action in their day-to-day life. Students came to appreciate the two-fold learning goals in school as about both their academic and character learning, which brings Catholic values and virtues to life.
- The project gave the students opportunities to learn more about the value of team work and collective collaboration. They had a chance to voice their opinions, thoughts and ideas and their voices were heard, valued and part of each school presentation. The adults – staff, parents and trustees – witnessed the capacity of the students to take ownership and leadership of a very important initiative.