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## ***A Broadly Shared Mission, Vision and Goals Founded on the Aspirational Images of the Educated Person***

### **Durham Catholic District School Board *Catholic Education: Learning and Living in Faith***

## **Reflection on the Discovery 2020 Strategic Planning Process and Strong Districts and their Leadership Research**

### **Background**

The Durham Catholic District School Board is a vibrant school district situated in the Greater Toronto Area, and spanning the Cities of Oshawa and Pickering, Towns of Ajax and Whitby, and Townships of Brock, Scugog and Uxbridge. Home to 38 Elementary Schools, 7 Secondary Schools, and 6 Alternative and Continuing Education Sites; we serve 21,310 elementary and secondary students.

During the 2013-2014 academic year, we experienced a cycle of renewal, with the appointment of a new Director of Education, Anne O'Brien, and a number of new Supervisory Officers. At this time, Durham Catholic District School Board engaged in a comprehensive system and community level review in order to develop the 2014-2019 Strategic Plan, entitled *Discovery 2020*.

The *Discovery 2020* strategic planning process was developed to help shape the vision of the Board for the next five years, and was built to align with the goals outlined in the Ministry of Education's plan, *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*, as well as the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations. Following a year of comprehensive consultation, analysis, and review, working groups representing a cross-section of stakeholders, established three key principles and ten integrated themes to support what our students require to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Within each theme, there are three identified priorities and three broad goals. Through this planning process, more detailed plans with strategic actions, timelines and indicators of success have been developed. A new mission, vision and value statement for the Board has also emerged to help invigorate this new strategic direction.

At the onset of the year, the focus for *Discovery 2020* was established through a process of consultation aimed at developing our system direction. What did we hope for our Catholic Graduates just entering the system when they graduate leading into 2020? What will our students require as 21<sup>st</sup> century learners? How should our system respond to meet these needs?

The *Discovery 2020: Strategic Plan* process was aligned with the following "specific practices" outlined in the *Practices of Strong District Leaders*:

### **Staff Survey**

- Strong District Leaders ensure that a transparent visioning/direction-setting process is carried out and consult extensively about district directions as part of the process;
- Spend sufficient time to ensure that the mission, vision and goals (directions) of the system are widely known, understood and shared by all members of their organization; and
- Articulate, demonstrate and model the system's goals, priorities and values to staffs when visiting schools and embed district directions in improvement plans, principal meetings and leader-initiated interactions.

## **Development Phase**

### **Staff Survey**

- Numbered Memo was issued to all staff in the system seeking participation
- Email blast was sent with link to online survey
- 1,100 responses were received and analyzed

### **Student Voice Forums**

- Chair of the Board and Director of Education visited all schools, and in each secondary schools had lunch hour Student Voice Forums
- Students were invited to share their views in conversation and in written form
- Students completed individual questionnaires in order to identify challenges and opportunities within the school system moving forward

### **Stakeholder Consultation**

- Staff hosted a Priest Breakfast to seek input on the future of Catholic education in Durham
- Staff sought the input of the Durham Catholic Parent Involvement Committee through presentations and updates at monthly meetings
- Staff sought the input of the Special Education Advisory Committee and the various associated community groups through presentations and monthly updates
- Monthly updates were provided to the Board of Trustees with opportunity for feedback and dialogue
- Regular and ongoing communications were shared with union affiliates and all staff

### **Public Consultation Sessions**

- Members of the community were invited to three sessions at various locations across the district
- Sessions were promoted through back-pack letters, board website, newspaper and parish bulletins
- Trustees and Durham Catholic Parent Involvement Committee members helped co-facilitate with staff
- Community members provided input on key questions related to strategic planning
- Every participant in attendance at a consultation session was sent a personalized letter of thanks from the Director of Education

### **Invitation to Conversation with the Director of Education**

- Through the staff survey, staff were given the opportunity to request a one-on-one conversation with the Director
- Face-to-face full day sessions were scheduled through a series of Saturdays

### **Planning Committee Sessions**

- A large committee comprised of members from each school and all stakeholder groups
- Session #1: Introduction to Strategic Planning – Mission, Vision and Values
- Session #2: Setting the Stage
- Session #3: Developing the Vision
- Session #4: Evaluating Opportunities
- Session #5: Looking at Key Data

- Session #6: Selecting Key Strategies
- Session #7: Developing the Plan
- Session #8: Determining Next Steps

Through the Discovery 2020 Strategic Planning Committee and all of the actions identified above, three Guiding Principles emerged which are now considered central to the promotion of student well-being and achievement in the Durham Catholic District School Board. Excellence, Equity and New Evangelization are prominently featured on all documents and publications developed within the Board, as central to our work moving forward:

- **Excellence:** Children and students of all ages will achieve high levels of academic performance, acquire valuable skills and demonstrate good citizenship. Educators will be supported in learning continuously and will be recognized as among the best in the world.
- **Equity:** All children and students will be inspired to reach their full potential, with access to rich learning experiences that begin at birth and continue into adulthood.
- **New Evangelization:** Students will embrace the Catholic Church's renewed efforts to meet the spiritual needs of today's society, as witnesses to the Gospel values in their everyday lives.

*(Sources: Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education, Ontario Ministry of Education, and Religious Education, Ontario Catholic Elementary Curriculum Policy Document Grades 1-8)*

In keeping with the three guiding principles of Excellence, Equity and New-Evangelization ten key themes emerged and working groups were formed to support:

- Witnessing Faith
- Teaching and Learning
- Expanding Pathways
- Inspiring Leadership
- Celebrating Inclusion
- Serving in Partnership
- Emerging Technology
- Advancing Communications
- Managing Resources
- Continuing Education

### **Strategic Planning Working Committees**

- A committee was formed to develop a new statement of mission, vision and values
- Each department led a working committee to develop an action plan for each key priority area (ten themes)
- Supervisory Officers served as facilitators in the development of strategic priorities, goals and actions for each area of the Board (corporate and academic alignment)
- Realistic timelines for completion of goals and actions and indicators of success were identified to assess the progress through the Director's Annual Report to the community and the DCDSB Balanced Scorecard

The impact of this collective work has been clear. We have noted that there is an increased sense of integration across the varied departments in our system. No one theme stands alone, for example, the work of Serving in Partnership will support Teaching and Learning. Links can be made across the themes, and the realization that we have a coherent and cohesive plan brings a renewed energy into the system. The fact that the plan was created through a collective and sometimes pain staking process has resulted in a strong sense of ownership and clear sense of direction. We believe that all of our actions, whether within departments of the Board, or at school or classroom level, should reflect the system priorities. The strategic plan can now provide us with the basis from which to develop PD plans, departmental plans, and reconsider the relevancy of our board and school improvement plans. The extensive consultation process, together with transparent visioning and direction setting, we believe to be key to harnessing momentum and gaining traction as a system.

## Implementation Phase

- New statement of Mission, Vision and Values was articulated and shared on an ongoing basis at all Principals Meetings and gatherings
- All public addresses by the Director of Education reference the three guiding principles of Equity, Excellence and New Evangelization, and all meetings close with the Mission Statement
- Supervisory Officers have presented their priority area(s) across a variety of contexts, including Animation of Culture activities with central staff and at each monthly Board of Trustees meeting
- *Discovery 2020: Strategic Plan* was released to all employees through email link and appeared as a prominent link on the Board website
- *Discovery 2020* was shared with all stakeholder groups including our Parish priests, D.C.P.I.C. and S.E.A.C. committees, and community members
- The Board Improvement Plan for Student Well-Being and Achievement infographic was updated to include the new Mission Statement and was provided to every employee of the board (vinyl adhesive visual)
- The Board and School Improvement Plan templates were reorganized to align with the strategic plan format
- Graphic design elements were embedded in all digital and print communications to align with the guiding principles and themes within the plan
- The opening Professional Activity Day in September 2014 was organized to launch exploration of the Strategic Plan
- A video was created to launch and promote *Discovery 2020*
- A system-wide P.A. Day in November 2014 was held with all employees of the Board to continue to articulate the system directions and highlight the guiding principles and themes within the plan The Director's Annual Report to the Community and Annual Balanced Scorecard has indicated measurement towards the realization of goals and indicators of success identified in both *Discovery 2020* and the Annual Board Improvement Plan (academic and corporate)

The impact of this very intentional approach to building a common understanding of our mission, vision and values, through the *Discovery 2020* plan along with the three guiding principles of Excellence, Equity and New Evangelization, is that we note that people are using the same language and considering more carefully whether the work that they are performing, activities they are planning, or decisions they are making reflect the system direction. We are better equipped to create a greater sense of alignment, and future planning is much more focused in nature. When the priorities are well understood, the importance of the work ahead becomes clearer. In creating alignment, we have been much more efficient in allocating our time, energy and resources to the issues that matter most.

## Alignment and Coherence

### Our Mission

- The mission is displayed in each school and Board
- It is recited at the end of every Board, Director's and Administrative Council meetings
- It is widely memorized and central to the work we do
- Printed on all documents of the Board

### Our Vision

- We are reminded of our Board's vision on an ongoing basis through our planning

### Our Catholic Values

- Presentation stand in every school foyer
- Laminated poster in every classroom
- Presentation stand in every church affiliated with school board
- These are widely known and integrated into the Board, school and classroom level planning

### Video

- Prepared video for dimension # 1

### Infographic

- Created an adhesive information graphic for all 2,600 members of the Board for their computers, mouse pads, centered on our Board Mission and Strategic Planning

### Discovery 2020 Strategic Plan

- Discovery 2020 Strategic Plan 2014-2019

### Board Improvement Plan

- The Board Improvement Plan replicates the design and organization of the Strategic Plan, as it derives smart goals from each themes of the plan

### Director's Annual Report to the Community

- The Director's Annual Report once again is organized in the same design and order of the strategic plan and board improvement plan; is data driven based on empirical evidence

### Balanced Scorecard

- Each June, a balance scorecard is presented to the Board of Trustees and staff outlining goals achieved from the Board Improvement Plan and Strategic Plan in that academic year

### Publishing Materials

- All materials published from every department is developed subsequently following the guidelines of the Discovery 2020 Strategic Plan, relating directly to the strategic plan through their visual identity and branding with icons identified

### **Director's Weekly update**

- Each week, the Director provides an update to Trustees and staff outlining various activities that related to the Board Strategic Plan with icons identified

### **Director's Performance Appraisal**

- The Director's Performance Appraisal relates directly to each area of the Strategic Plan and Board Improvement Plan with specific accomplishments within

### **Board Reports**

- Various Board Reports are presented on updates of the Strategic Plan, e.g., Emerging Technology, Teaching and Learning

### **Screen Savers**

- Screen savers on every computer relates back to Mission, Vision and Values and a monthly graphic that focuses on the Board Improvement Plan

### **Communications**

- Daily [homepage banners](#) are posted to reflect Board/school events, announcements
- Director sends out various messages to the entire system (e.g., Welcome Back, Thanksgiving, Advent, Christmas, New Year, Family Day, Lent, Summer blessings, etc), updating them on key Discovery 2020 strategic directions and accomplishments

## **Summary**

The *Discovery 2020* initiative reveals features consistent with strong districts identified in the research of Ken Leithwood. Upon further reflection, we can see that specific practices are not limited to the identified dimension, but can be identified throughout the 9 Dimensions in the research. Key themes that emerge across the contexts link back to the importance of the collectivity of the work, and the importance of remaining engaged with the priority areas in the strategic plan, and a tenacious persistence in sharing these key messages with your school system (at all levels). The framework in *Strong Districts and Their Leadership* provides an invaluable tool for self-reflection in planning for system level growth and improvement.