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

Dufferin-Peel Catholic DSB

The Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board is one of the largest and most diverse school boards in Ontario. It serves approximately 84,000 students in 149 schools located throughout Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon and Orangeville and an additional 46,000 students in adult and continuing education programs. With over 10,000 employees, the board is also one of the largest employers in the region. The schools in Dufferin-Peel are organized into seven Families of Schools: Mississauga South, Mississauga North, Mississauga East, Mississauga Brampton Central, Brampton North East, Brampton East/Caledon/Dufferin/Malton and Brampton West.

Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board's current Catholic Board Learning Plan 2013-2016 for Well-Being and Achievement highlights system goals through the metaphor of ripples of water. The ripples represent the interconnected nature of the system and provide guiding principles to inform the role each in the system play in supporting the well-being and achievement of all learners. The metaphor is powerful in that it gives a visual to a complex, multi layered and interdependent network and structure. All areas of the ripple are centered on the learner. Ripples and layers share the common focus that all can achieve and be supported in the development of Christ's vision of the whole person.

We continue to create a collaborative culture of care that supports high standards for all learners, emphasizes continuous improvements for all learners and is responsive to the full range of each learner's God given gifts and abilities. The Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations (OCSGE) guides our outcomes and helps all throughout the system and in our communities understand our long-term vision for each student.



...On the way to becoming an **Ontario Catholic School Graduate**



Discerning Believer



Effective Communicator



Reflective, Creative, Holistic Thinker



Self-Directed, Responsible, Lifelong Learner



Collaborative Contributor



Caring Family Member



Responsible Citizen

The culture of the system can be described as being inclusive of all learners, focused on developing leaders throughout the system layers, responsive to the voices of all partners and as having an understanding of the evolutionary nature of God's work. In a practical sense, a continued focus on coherence and alignment of all structures, activities and supports is on-going and has met with a considerable degree of success as evidenced in EQAO results over time, various system data sources and also in the extraordinary students we continue to attract and graduate.

This paper describes the board's approach, over the past several years, to two characteristics of strong districts¹;

- *A broadly shared mission, vision and goals founded on ambitious images of the educated person*
- *Job-embedded professional development for all members of the organization.*

Shared mission, vision and goals:

The shared vision of the learner flows through the many layers of operations. The Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations (OCSGE) is a prominent example in the system, and other Catholic systems, of the outcomes we have for all students and encourages all staff to see their role in the outcomes. The OCSGE inform plans at all levels and is a visual reminder in each school community of the vision the system has for all learners. The voice of each unique community is also heard through the Board of Trustees. Dufferin-Peel's *Strategic System Plan (2010-2015)* is developed every five years and reviewed each year by the Board of Trustees. Through the *System Direction* the plan is put into action. Priorities are aligned with the Ministry of Education priorities. Community insights and priorities identified through the process are the guiding principles upon which all Board operations and policy are developed. Identified priorities within the *Strategic System Plan* and the *System Direction* include Catholicity, Parish-Home-School, the Learning Environment, Physical Environment and Community Engagement. With each of these identified priorities, the current initiatives and the plans for moving forward are outlined and

¹ Leithwood, K (2013). *Strong Districts and Their Leadership*. Toronto: Final report of research for the Institute for Educational Leadership of Ontario.

reviewed. Each year the Director of Education reports to the Board of Trustees on the many initiatives, next steps or adjustments along the way, highlighting where we have been, where we are and recommended direction. In addition, all Superintendents are required to present to Trustees yearly through the monthly Faith and Program Committee Meetings on various aspects of instructional practice and direction as well as department activities as aligned to the strategic plan and the Catholic Board Learning Plan.

The *System Direction* is shared with all school communities to facilitate opportunities to respond to aspects of the plan. System priorities are reviewed with Catholic School Councils, through Regular Board Meetings, the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) and Faith and Program Meetings to ensure the priorities are communicated. Communities respond back through the Catholic School Councils, SEAC and the Family of Schools representatives on the Central Committee Catholic School Councils (CCCSC). All input is reviewed through the Board researchers to inform system directions and updates.



The *System Strategic Plan and the System Directions* documents guide both the Catholic Board Learning Plan and the Catholic Board Corporate Plan, which provides the foundation for both instructional and corporate goals of the board. The Board's Equity Plan and Technology Plan also support the shared system priorities. All of these documents are aligned through our shared priorities and reflect the mission, vision and values of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board and our vision of all learners.

Through these system documents the Ministry of Education's Achieving Excellence³ priorities of [achieving excellence](#), [ensuring equity](#), [promoting well-being](#) and [enhancing public confidence](#) are supported. Continuing to engage and build confidence in all school communities is critical to the long term health of the system.

² Dufferin-Peel's Catholic Board Learning Plan 2013-2016 and Catholic Corporate Plan are informed by Trustee priorities as outlined in the System Strategic Plan and System Directions 2010-2015 documents. Trustees have approved the next updated plan building on these plans and ministry directions.

³ Achieving Excellent, Ministry of Education, April 2014

Dufferin-Peel has applied its distinctive Catholic lens to develop these shared priorities and articulate shared beliefs to support further improvement for instructional practices and student achievement in all schools. All plans have been developed for the purpose of making further progress in fostering the well-being and achievement for all learners. The Catholic Board Learning Plan (CBLP) 2013 - 2016 builds on the learning from the previous CBLP.

The previous plan, Dufferin-Peel's Catholic Board Learning Plan 2010-2013, articulated the Board's commitment to improved student achievement and overall well-being for all learners. The Ministry's three core priorities⁴ and the board's five core priorities⁵ provided a framework to support this commitment. The Plan was organized into four pillars: Catholic, Community, Culture and Caring, Literacy, Numeracy, Pathways and Transitions. Each of these pillars included explicitly defined outcomes for schools and identified potential data sources to inform next steps in goal setting within schools, divisions and departments. Alignment and coherence was – and continues to be – a strongly embedded guiding principle for all system, Family and school plans.

Dufferin-Peel's current Catholic Board Learning Plans (2013-2016) continued to build on the capacity of all leaders in the classroom, schools and throughout the system. The next steps in terms of focus or 'big idea' for the system was determined to be collaborative inquiry. Through a year over year focus in the previous Catholic Board Learning Plan pillars of Catholicity, Numeracy, Literacy, Pathways and Transitions and Professional Learning, staff, students and families were engaged in working to support each learner in meeting the outcomes of the Ontario Catholic Graduate School Expectations through the implementation of school goals encompassing expected practices and a variety of outcomes. This strong instructional practice and strategies approach moved system thinking and supported the alignment of classroom practices as well as several monitoring pieces to ensure the on-going collection of data to inform next steps.

A key part of collaborative inquiry, extensive collection and reviews of data from professional learning sessions, as well as hearing the voice of the Catholic School Learning Teams and Catholic Family Learning teams, has had many professional learning implications.

Dufferin-Peel's Catholic Board Learning Plan 2013-2016 continues to provide the system with a shared vision and focus for refining efforts to realize our Shared Priorities. Within the CBLP the elements of Catholic Community Culture and Caring (CCCC), Pathways, Teaching and Learning, as well as Professional Learning and Leading each have clearly articulated foundational principles and practices to describe and support the actions we take in all schools to ensure overall well-being,

⁴ Higher levels of student achievement reduced gaps in student achievement and increased public confidence in publicly funded education. Ministry of Education, Ontario.

⁵ Catholicity, Learning Environment, Community engagement, Parish-Home-School and Physical environment. Dufferin-Peel's Catholic Board Learning Plan 2010-2013

learning, and achievement in these four areas. The interconnected nature of the matrix in the CBLP is critical to understanding the Catholic Board Learning Plan. We continue to share and explore best practices – and next best practices - with our communities, both elementary and secondary, through a variety of learning opportunities such as bullying awareness programs, diversity conferences and school-based parent information nights. In addition, the Board’s highly active Central Committee for Catholic School Councils (CCCSC) also engages all communities in many learning opportunities and provides a forum for reviewing new and emerging issues or initiatives to gain parent voice. Each Family of Schools has a representative from the local Catholic School Councils on CCCSC. Within the schools the Catholic School Councils have been engaged in the communication process and feedback to evolving priorities and initiatives. This feedback is gathered through Trustee attendance and through site administrators. Our sense of community engagement continues to be supported by many relevant initiatives including the implementation of the healthy schools strategy, the Ministry of Education’s Equity and Inclusive Education policy and a range of communication approaches with all communities. The Board continues to be committed to demonstrating and celebrating the positive role of Catholic education in our classrooms, schools and the wider community as well as the roles that each can play in the formation of Catholic students.

We recognize that strong parish-home-school connections are foundational to supporting the development of learners on their journey to meeting the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations. We continue to nurture these connections and explore together pathways to support each learner. Our Zone meetings with the Archdiocese include all school administrators who meet to review processes, emerging challenges and issues and to determine communication strategies for engaging community members and to further develop community partnerships. The shared sense of focus and commitment is clear.

Job embedded professional learning for all members of the organization

The activities and strategies of the CBLP also focus on professional learning and instructional leadership as a system priority. In order for all staff to respond to the needs of students, staff has to be appropriately equipped in terms of practice and resources. The terms of reference for all professional learning are built on the identified expected practices⁶ and collaborative inquiry⁷. The system priority of supporting all as learners – students, teachers, administrators, corporate managers, and superintendents became embedded in how we see our role related to each learner. All staff has a role in informing the next steps, being respectful of the unique circumstances or considerations within each school community. Increasingly the dialogue in the system at all levels is about the role and connection of the individual to the student in the classroom. All are challenged to find the thread to the child.

⁶ Dufferin-Peel Catholic Board Learning Plan 2010-2013

⁷ Dufferin-Peel Catholic Board Learning Plan 2013-2016.

Over the past three years we have learned to embrace collaborative inquiry as a process for professional learning. We believe building collaborative practices through inquiry will support and engage all learners to grow in community. This approach is supported through research, review of system professional learning data and the Ministry of Education.

A critical step to building capacity with collaborative inquiry was to grow a common language and understanding of what collaborative inquiry was and where it could lead. A variety of pilot projects over the previous years had allowed a number of entry points to be identified and several structures did evolve in response to this data.

Professional learning has moved to be more centered to the classroom and school. School administrators continue to be engaged in developing capacity with instructional leadership, especially our newer colleagues, but also to understand some critical aspects of inquiry. This understanding is developed through the Family of Schools Learning Team who continues as leaders within each Family of Schools. The learning priority for each Family of Schools Superintendent became professional learning. This major part of the monthly meetings explores approaches and models that can be adjusted and adapted for school administrators to use with their own staffs and to identify next steps needed for learning opportunities.

These learning opportunities are developed through the Board's Program Department and are shared with Family Learning Teams (each Family of Schools has a lead team consisting of elementary and secondary administrators). These Family Learning Team meetings occur several times a year to collect and review exit data from previous Family sessions and to be responsive to identified professional learning opportunities over the next few months. This collaboration involves the Family of Schools' Superintendents, Program and Special Education Superintendents and the Associate Director of Instructional Services who review and adjust proposed plans to meet the diverse learning needs of each Family of Schools.

In addition to the Family of Schools professional development focus, the Program Department provides a wide range of professional learning opportunities for teachers to be engaged in professional learning cycles. In the past schools were assigned to networks, release time was provided and administrators attended sessions throughout the year where a co-planning and co-learning stance was employed. Data from the school was used to develop next steps, to inform cycles for continuous improvement, and to identify professional learning needs for teachers and other staff. Program Consultants were instrumental in facilitating these networks and providing research-based guidance for the process. This approach is important to ensuring alignment and coherence throughout the system while respecting the local data, which identified the need to differentiate the learning at the school and in the Family of Schools.

The Family of School's meeting professional development continued to evolve and this year Principal Learning Teams (or pods) are engaged in "cycles". A "Plan, Act, Assess, and Reflect" cycle is commonly used throughout the system. Administrators review data, develop inquiries around problems of practice, meet as teams and review within specific timelines. Cross-panel groupings also assure a K-12 perspective and support the connectedness to the OCSGE.

The networks structure evolved and became more classroom and school focused as well. Schools continue to be provided with release time and Families of Schools have access to the expertise of board Consultants. Release time allows for teacher attendance at Principal Learning Team collaborations and a variety of other in-school and cross Family initiatives and inquiries. This evolution allows for a deeper focus on problems of practice within classrooms and supports the personalization of the learning.

Monitoring of professional learning, resource and infrastructure needs is on-going. The expectation that Principals were to be in classrooms and Superintendents in schools was clear. A variety of system professional learning opportunities were provided for principals and superintendents to support the learning. Resources such as Instructional Rounds in Education (City, Elmore, Fiarman and Teitel 2009), The Art of Focused Conversation for Schools (Nelson2001), The Moral Imperative of School Leadership (Fullan 2003), Motion Leadership (Fullan 2010), Putting Faces on the Data (Sharratt and Barber 2012) all play critical roles in informing the professional learning. Dr. Sharratt and Dr. Katz were also retained to conduct a variety of learning sessions with senior administrators and school principals to connect research understandings to conditions and data related to schools.

Dufferin-Peel values job-embedded professional learning for all members of the organization and made it a priority to align leadership opportunities and practices in all areas both Instructional and Corporate. All professional learning opportunities continue to be rooted in Gospel values and reflect the Board's core strategic principles. Job-embedded learning is a core aspect of functioning within the board and has gradually become more intentional and aligned with leadership development over the past several years. This alignment has helped to ensure equity and support for all who consider leadership and are successful. The Board Leadership Development Strategy (BLDS), the Program and Special Education and Support Services, Instructional Council and Corporate Services have worked toward aligning the wide range of system professional learning opportunities provided to staff. One strategic feature of our current plan is to enhance the use of technology for teaching and learning in order to engage our students in the ethical and responsive use of technology and to support all classroom, school and system leaders in building efficacy with all technology. Attracting and supporting new leaders is an ongoing priority and drives many of the system's professional learning opportunities. Succession planning research in the district has informed the goal for this aspect of operations. This research indicated

that a high percentage of our administrative staff was becoming eligible to retire. The district's Board Leadership Development Strategy (BLDS)⁸ was developed to respond to this challenge in three sectors: Recruiting and Selecting Catholic Leaders, Providing Professional Learning Opportunities for Candidates in the Principal and Vice Principal Pools and the Board Mentoring Program.

Differentiated professional learning opportunities were aligned with the Ontario Leadership Framework (OLF)⁹ with specific focus on Catholic school-level leadership, Catholic system-level leadership, the Personal Leadership Resources, the Ontario Curriculum and other Ministry resource documents such as Growing Success and Learning for All.

a) Recruiting and selecting Catholic leaders.

Dufferin-Peel has a long tradition of supporting potential leaders and continuing to develop newly appointed leaders. The path to formal leadership positions includes participation in assessment days, interviews and recommendations of supervisors. More recently the invitation to the process of leadership discernment, both Instructional and Corporate, has become board-wide and open to all who express an interest. This invitation is no longer the proverbial "tap on the shoulder", but an equitable opportunity, which reaches all potential leaders. As a reflection of this practice, it has been many years since there was a need to recruit leaders from outside the system.

b) Providing professional learning opportunities for candidates in the Principal and Vice-principal pools.

Once successful, candidates are given a variety of on-going profession development opportunities in order to prepare for the appointment to a leadership role in the future. They have the opportunity to network with and learn from others currently in the role. This facilitated network building has been crucial to the success and preparation of candidates in all the leadership pools.

c) Providing a variety of differentiated professional learning opportunities and supports for newly appointed leaders.

Moving into a position of leadership places one in a steep learning curve. Through the Board Leadership Development Strategy, newly appointed leaders undergo a two-year cycle in the Mentoring program. The key component of this program is to connect new administrators with a mentor who is able to guide their learning and understanding as it relates to the Ontario Catholic Leadership Framework and to deepen understanding of the importance of relationships. Throughout the program, both Mentor and Mentee are invited to participate in professional learning opportunities which align with both leadership development and our Catholic Board Learning Plan. These opportunities have proved to be successful and are now open to all administrators throughout the system. A new initiative titled the *Art of the*

⁸ Board Leadership Development Strategy

⁹ The Ontario Leadership Framework

Principalship also provides aspiring leaders the opportunity to see into the life of the leaders in schools and to inquire into the relational and artistic side of the role. The focus of these programs continues to be provision of a variety of differentiated professional learning opportunities and supports for newly appointed leaders. Data are continuously collected to inform next steps through “exit tickets”¹⁰, discussions, focused conversations, focus groups and surveys to inform next steps. In response to data from these sources, the program has evolved to include Summer Inquiry Coaches; recently retired Principals partnered with newly appointed Principals to work through professional learning cycles, learn the school landscape, identify and understand data sources to inform decisions and to develop goals in transition plans.

The alignment of all departments with the BLDS has created equitable opportunities for assuming leadership and participating in professional learning. Staff are supported and guided with opportunities developed in response to data. There is increased confidence among staff and greater willingness to continue the leadership journey.

The call to leadership is developed through our student population as well. Student Trustees at the board table bring a youthful perspective to deliberations. Catholic Student Councils within schools foster leadership opportunities and are provided learning opportunities through such agencies as Blue Veil and the Harmony Group to support student confidence in leadership capacities and in finding their voice. These Councils are very engaged, with Chaplains and Chaplaincy Leads in the Secondary Schools, with a wide range of social justice projects to enrich communities. At the elementary level Youth Faith Ambassadors are found in all schools. These students take leadership roles within the schools for faith activities, social justice initiatives and engage in system learning opportunities. The Adult Faith Ambassadors connect with the system mission of a faith centered life and supports the faith journey within schools and shares the joy of the Gospel messages in sessions throughout the system.

Conclusion:

The success and well-being of all learners is central to our mission. The Board continues to be committed to effective assessment and instruction across disciplines, particularly in mathematics, and to continue the support of research-informed instructional practices and approaches. The Board continues to review and implement a variety of programs to be responsive to the needs and interests identified in our communities and voiced through parent groups, Trustees and Catholic School Councils, as well as staffs (e.g., International Baccalaureate expansion, regional French Immersion, Specialist High Skills Majors, and Early

¹⁰ Exits tickets are responses collected at the end of each session asking for feedback to the value of sessions, applications to current understandings and learning needs for next session. At times the exit ticket takes the form of an electronic survey.

Years/ Full Day Learning) to support the development of our learners into responsible and ethical global citizens.

Collaboration and relationship, part of our shared vision of a faith-filled community, are essential to our success in professional learning. School teams are learning together about collaborative inquiry as a process for professional learning and leading through, for example, adult faith development, the New Teacher Induction Program, Mentoring initiatives, as well as school wide cycles of inquiry.

As a Catholic community of learners we actively engage in joint work to continue to improve well-being, learning and achievement by building knowledge, coherence, and a capacity for change. We are committed to improving practice through a deep understanding of when and why instruction is effective. Collaboratively planning for school improvement and inquiring into practice will support on-going learning and innovation for all. By carefully managing all transitions, as broadly as year to year milestones or as specifically as day to day shifts, we can better ensure that all learners have the opportunity to realize their vocation to the fullest extent of their God-given potential.