



# Ontario Institute for Education Leadership L'Institut de leadership en éducation de l'Ontario

*Ontario Leaders Collaborating for Student Achievement, Equity and Well-being  
La collaboration des leaders en Ontario assure la réussite, l'équité et le bien-être des élèves.*

## **Leading for Equity and Excellence at Kipling Collegiate Institute Mohammed Adil Askary**

Kipling Collegiate Institute is a small, multicultural secondary school located in central Etobicoke in the city of Toronto. When principal Mohammed Adil Askary moved to Kipling in 2017, the once-celebrated school was in jeopardy of closing due to its declining enrolment. This story documents Adil's journey as he leads the school in a multi-faceted, complex and dramatic transformation that has resulted in equity and inclusion and has enhanced Kipling's reputation by ensuring that Kipling Collegiate Institute offers what all other high schools offer their students and families. It's a powerful narrative that shows how he drew on his Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs) to successfully enact the practices of the [Ontario Leadership Framework \(OLF\)](#) and ensure student learning and achievement, equity and well-being and as important, a sense of belonging at school.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Kipling Collegiate Institute's strength lies in the diversity of its student population with as many as 48 countries of birth represented. Over half of Kipling students were born in Somalia or Pakistan or have Somalian or Pakistani family backgrounds. In addition, many students are new to Canada with 28% having arrived within the last five years. Only 52% of Kipling's students come from Toronto District School Board (TDSB) feeder schools.

In 2017 when I became principal of Kipling Collegiate Institute, the school's enrolment had declined from 650 in 2013 to 388 students. Over the past four years Kipling's student enrolment has gradually grown to 600 with 639 students pre-registered for the 2021-22 school year. As our student enrolment has increased, so too has our teaching staff which has expanded from 20 to 41. Individually and together our staff is a cohesive group of passionate, caring professionals who consistently bring a student-centred approach to their work.

### **MY FIRST YEAR – 2017-2018**

It's important to say at the outset that the I grew up in the Dixon neighbourhood which is where many Kipling students live. My parents were recent arrivals to a new country and worked hard to ensure that their children had the best outcomes at school such that all

three of us are educators. Many in my extended family still live in the Kipling community.

This lived experience, combined with my background as an educator and principal, working previously in a school that was tailored to provide differentiated supports to students with special needs, greatly influenced what I hoped and aimed for at Kipling. I feel that it's my responsibility and duty to help ensure that every student who walks into the school and down its halls and in its classrooms has the same opportunities that I have been blessed with. This is what drives me as principal each and every day.

My leadership story at Kipling unfolded beginning March 2017 when I met with School TDSB Superintendent Angela Nardi-Addesa. At this meeting, she shared with me the opportunity to move to Kipling in order to support a school community that had been navigating many challenges including possible closure. I wasn't looking for a change as I was in my second year at one of the largest congregated special education schools in the district. However, the opportunity of rebuilding and revisioning a school from the ground up was rare in a large school board.

The meeting with Angela lasted over an hour as she outlined what was involved in the move to Kipling. At the end of the hour, I had made my decision to move to Kipling and did so with confidence, excitement and the sense of challenge that comes when handed such a great opportunity. There were a lot of unknowns because as Angela explained the [Pupil Accommodation Review \(PAR\)](#) which included Kipling had not been completed and there was still a possibility that it would be closed.

Psychological  
Personal Leadership  
Resources (PLRs) –  
resilience, optimism,  
self-efficacy,  
proactivity

When I agreed to the move, I wasn't sure whether I would be going to Kipling to close it or to transform it into a better place for students, staff and the community. In either case, it represented a huge leadership opportunity although it wasn't until I moved to Kipling that I knew just how great the challenge would be.

As it turned out, Kipling would remain open and receive students from neighbouring Scarlett Heights which would close in June 2018. In June 2017 when I met with Angela, School Council Chairs, the local feeder school principal, and Kipling's vice-principal, she shared a vision of renewal and refresh for a school that had seen enrolment reduced.

This leadership journey was truly paved by Angela in her role as school superintendent. Since the day we met to discuss my move to Kipling and over time, she has been a consistently strong and passionate advocate of a promising future for Kipling and supporter of my leadership. Her presence at every meeting and function was critical to the success once the journey began. She was completely invested in seeing that Kipling and its students, staff and community had all available opportunities to achieve its renewed goals.

The Kipling story is complex and multifaceted because of the many issues that arose beginning in the fall 2017. These were issues that influenced virtually every action I took and every decision I made. It wasn't long before I could see that my role as principal would extend beyond the traditional one. Transformational and instructional leadership would continue to figure prominently along with my role as staff developer, visionary, student coach and counsellor, and family and community advocate. Integrated in these roles, depending on the circumstances, were roles as engineer, architect, chef, interior designer, landscaper, and more.

It's a story that I find impossible to tell in a sequential way. I'm not able to say what I did first, second, third and so on. Instead, as I reflect on the past four years, it seems as though I was pulled in many directions confronted by a multitude of pressures and expectations concurrently, every hour of every day, with no starting or stopping points.

Although the elements that together make up my story are described individually, they are inseparable and interconnected, with each one having an impact on the other. The overarching priority was to keep my sights set on creating a culture of learning and professionalism that ensured well-being and engagement of both students and staff.

1.1 Building a shared vision

From day one, I had four fundamental goals in mind for the school:

1. Ensure students at Kipling had equity of opportunity and access compared to other TDSB high schools;
2. Establish a caring and accepting school community that fosters a sense of belonging and pride students see, feel, and hear when they enter the school;
3. Create a physical space that captures students' voices, reflects their identities, and responds to their unique and diverse needs; and
4. Holds the promise of providing a world-class education and opportunities to become responsible global citizens who are good at school and at life.

## **Confronting Kipling Collegiate Institute's Realities in 2017**

The rapidly declining student population at Kipling stood out as the challenge that needed to be addressed immediately while at the same time ensuring that the students who were enrolled were supported. To rein in the decline there were some big hurdles to overcome and they would have to be tackled concurrently.

- **Optional attendance**

Optional attendance is a TDSB process that allows students to apply to and attend schools other than their "designated school" which is determined by their home address. This process had resulted in competition among secondary schools. Kipling's close proximity to four other large secondary schools that were within five kilometres and have strong profiles of excellence and an abundance of specialized programs meant that fewer students from neighbouring feeder schools would choose to attend Kipling.

For Kipling, low enrolment meant it could not offer the range of programs that attracted students from other schools. In this sense, optional attendance was a systemic barrier that contributed to Kipling's declining enrolment and in turn its ability to provide the range of programs that all students should be able to access. Kipling remained the last choice for many of its students with about 50% of students from feeder schools choosing to attend Kipling.

- **Aging buildings**

I believe that the road to building belongingness in a school and its community is having a physical environment that is warm and inviting, reflects student identities, and is in good repair. It's a place that students look forward to coming to each day – a place that inspires them to learn and grow and collaborate with their teachers and their peers. In 2007, Kipling did not fit this description.

Kipling was built in the 1960s and when I arrived, every dimension of its age was in plain sight. The gym floor was shabby and showed its years of wear and tear. Its bleachers were long overdue for demolition. The library felt like it was stuck in a time warp. The kitchen had been closed for five years. Unappealing menus that ignored the cultures and tastes of the school's students, combined with competition from fast food restaurants located across the street from the school, resulted in a decrease in student use. The cafeteria space was abandoned at lunchtime with students choosing to eat their lunches off site. This in turn created another set of challenges – constant reports from businesses about student behaviour when off site during school hours.

- **Reputation and stigma**

It was a short decade before I arrived at Kipling that it was celebrated in *Maclean's* magazine as one of [Canada's ten extraordinary high schools](#), and in the *Toronto Star* as a school known for its [unity and peace initiatives](#). The reality of [gang activity](#) in the school community presented a challenge that felt insurmountable. Over time, beliefs about the safety and security caused by this gang culture in the community had become firmly entrenched. Negative media coverage left the school branded and stigmatized as unsafe and undesirable among other school choices in the area. The media were unrelenting in [publishing news](#) that connected Kipling with gangs. The reputation stuck such that I actually received a call from a U.S. school in 2017 asking to visit with the goal of learning what it's like for a school to be besieged with gang activity among its students.

- **Lack of magnet or specialized programming**

Lack of specialized programming was a major reason for enrolment decline. All the secondary schools that surround Kipling had programs which attracted students whose home school was Kipling. Choice and opportunity at Kipling continued to decrease and as enrolment declined course options and programming were reduced. Kipling remained the last choice among five neighbourhood schools.

- **Pupil Accommodation Review (PAR) initiated**

Given this enrolment decline and subsequent underutilization, it was no surprise that during the 2016-17 school year, the TDSB initiated a [Pupil Accommodation Review](#) (PAR) that included Kipling. The review was conducted by a Pupil Accommodation Review Committee (PARC) whose members were students, parents, principals and superintendents of education. The results of the review and the PARC's recommendations had an enormous impact on my entry as the new principal at Kipling.

Instead of closing Kipling, I would be leading a turnaround. Effective June 30, 2018, Kipling would welcome and amalgamate its student population with students from neighbouring Scarlett Heights Entrepreneurial School whose enrolment had drastically declined. I would have a year to prepare for this merging.

### **The Pupil Accommodation Review Committee (PARC) Findings and Recommendations – Challenges and Opportunities**

The findings and recommendations of the PARC were informative and as it turned out they provided me with rich data that would inform my entry at Kipling. There were essential insights that had a direct impact on my leadership. In fact, they became my “go-to” checklist that I used to track progress and have a sense of accomplishment over time. What was recommended held promise for bringing new life to Kipling and at the same time defined my transition. My role in leading their implementation was clear – to mobilize staff, students and the community and turn the recommendations into reality.

5.2 Meeting the demands for external accountability

### **Renovating Kipling**

The good news in the review was the recommendation to renovate Kipling which resulted in the board submitting a business case to the Ministry of Education to approve extensive renovations at Kipling including:

- Conversion of the existing library/resource centre to a Learning Commons,
- Conversion of some existing classroom(s) into a robotics lab,
- Modernization of existing classroom(s) to align with the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) program and future Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) in Information and Communications Technology (ICT); e.g. broadcasting/video production equipment, 3D-printers, communications technology,
- Wireless network connectivity (Wi-Fi) throughout the entire school building,
- Purchase of new/updated furniture for use in classrooms and in the Learning Commons, and
- An updated fitness and weights room.

### **Academic program expansion**

There were also program changes to include having Kipling apply to the Ministry of Education for an Information and Communications Technology SHSM to build on their existing technology programs. This expanded program focus was expected to garner

interest and solidify Kipling as an Information and Communications Technology-focused school.

### **Renaming Kipling**

In addition, the PARC recommended that a process be initiated during the 2017-18 school year to create a new name and mascot for Kipling Collegiate Institute, with the new name to be implemented effective September 1, 2018.

### **Staff, student and community input**

The PARC made recommendations that needed to be implemented beginning immediately in my first year at Kipling. It also provided more data and insights into the school's students, families and community than I could ever have gathered in a quick and short-lived entry consultation. This was definitely one of the positive aspects of the PARC framework. It had established the voice of the community and reinforced the importance of working with the School Council to keep in mind the needs of the families of Kipling students and also the students of Scarlett Heights. It confirmed that focusing on developing relationships and building trust both inside the school and in its surrounding community would be key to the future success of Kipling.

2.4 Building trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents

The following outlines what the PARC heard from students, staff and the community.

#### **Students:**

- Expressed significant interest in introducing new athletics and sports programs as well as technology, STEM, the Arts, and life skill,
- Identified facility upgrades to include gymnasiums, weights room, bleachers, swimming pool, track upgrades, basketball court, and field dome,
- Asked for improvements to the condition of the school such as fresh paint and washroom upgrades, adding cafeteria and food programs, improved library and Learning Commons, adding a student lounge/games room and prayer room, as well as technology improvements,
- Hoped for a variety of sports teams, clubs and supports,
- Showed interest in breakfast and lunch nutrition programs, after-school tutoring and resources, as well as extended hours for school facilities,
- Requested a greater number of child and youth workers, support workers, and educational assistants,
- Expressed interest in employment programs, programs for newcomers as well as health supports such as a school nurse,
- Hoped the increase in student population would be enough to run and offer extra-curricular activities,
- Raised concerns regarding the social transition of merging two schools, particularly, student safety and integration and suggested ways they could help facilitate a smooth transition, and

- Identified a number of “fresh start” ideas such as renaming the newly merged school and identifying a new school mascot.

**Staff:**

- Identified a wide variety of program interests including technology, athletics, and the Arts,
- Suggested introducing new programs such as a Justice and Law SHSM, and expanding the film, broadcasting, and music production currently offered,
- Wanted programing and financial investment to support a STEM focus,
- Identified the need for similar items as those identified by the students, with the addition of a greenhouse,
- Hoped for additional child and youth workers, support workers, and educational assistants,
- Recommended the introduction of programs for newcomers such as English as A Second Language (ESL) and Literacy Enrichment Academic Program (LEAP), and food and nutrition programs as well as health supports including a school nurse,
- Agreed that new approaches for promoting student safety, acceptance and integration were needed, and
- Wanted a welcome committee established and community outreach events offered such as community BBQs, Pep rallies, team building events, and school tours, assignment of hall monitors, and a new name for the school with combined Kipling and Scarlett Heights school memorabilia.

**The community:**

- Believed that a better mix of social status would result in a stronger school and suggested redrawing the secondary boundaries to facilitate a mix or integration of socioeconomic status, race, and cultures,
- Argued that the current divide in communities was based on socio-economic status, such that students are marginalized based on the neighbourhood they live in – resulting in lack of equity of program options,
- Claimed that the stigma surrounding Kipling will not change therefore resulting in continued poor enrolment, and
- Thought that Kipling Collegiate Institute could possibly close in the future due to under enrollment and under-utilization.

**Kipling Data in 2017**

As a starting point for focusing on student achievement, equity and well-being, the following were achievement and other data that provided a baseline in moving the school forward:

4.3 Monitoring student learning and school improvement progress

**Demographic data:**

- Enrolment had declined from 661 in 2012 to 388 in 2017,
- The top four countries of birth excluding Canada are Somalia, Pakistan, Kenya and the Philippines,

- 54% of students are born outside of Canada,
- 28% of students arrived in Canada in the last five years,
- Approximately 18% of students have an Individual Education Plan (IEP),
- Nearly 80% of students speak a language other than English in their homes,
- Out of 105 TDSB secondary schools, Kipling ranks 9<sup>th</sup> on the TDSB's Learning Opportunity Index (LOI) which ranks schools based on measures of external challenges affecting student success,
- 39% of families are single parent homes, and
- 21% of parents/guardians are college or university educated.

#### Achievement data:

- EQAO: Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT): 65% Gr. 9 Math Academic 53% and Applied 15%,
- Pass Rates: Grade 9 Math 94%, Applied English 87%, Academic Math 84%, Applied Math 69%, Grade 10 Academic English 90%, Applied English 82%, Academic Math 64%, Applied Math 62%,
- Credit Accumulation: Year 4 students with 30 or more credits 51%, Year 3 students with 23 or more credits 58%, Year 2 Students with 16 or more credits 40%, Year 1 students with 8 or more credits 62%,
- Graduation Rates (OSSD): Year 4 annual students 58%, Year 5 students 29%,
- Post-Secondary Rates: 52% of Year 4 students applied to Ontario Post-Secondary Institutions, 21% of Year 5 plus students applied to Ontario Post Secondary Institutions.

### Addressing Priority Challenges

Although there were many challenges that were unforeseen, I focused on those that were most obvious and needed immediate attention.

- **Setting directions and building a shared vision for Kipling**

At the top of my list of priorities was setting new directions and implicit in this was creating a shared vision for the “renewed” Kipling. I drew on a framework for building a shared vision that Angela had introduced to school leaders in my Learning Network (LN3). The framework consisted of two basic phases which I modified to work for Kipling and its unique situation:

1.1 Building a shared vision

The THINK phase lasted from September to October. It was a time when we asked ourselves key questions:

- Where are we now? We started by examining and analyzing our data.
- Where are we going? Reflecting on the data we began to focus on three areas or goals, one each for equity, well-being and achievement for the school.
- What do we need to learn? In order to achieve our goals, we identified the capacities in our learning community and what we needed to learn together.

The ACT phase which began in November was difficult and made it a challenge to establish an agreed-upon vision. I could see that the process of addressing key questions would be more important than getting a vision articulated in a sentence or two. We asked ourselves:

1.2 Identifying specific, shared, short-term goals

- How will we know that that we have reached our goals? We understood that what gets measured gets done and so we had to identify the indicators to understand the impact of our action. This entailed gathering evidence.
- What actions will we take together so that we move beyond thinking to doing what was needed to achieve results?
- What changes do we need to make in our thinking and in our behaviours? Making commitments in response to this question was challenging – first for staff to be willing to take the risk and respond openly and second to translate into action. It was essential that ours was an asset versus a deficit focus. We needed to identify what we were doing well and at the same time keep our minds open to determining how our thinking and actions might need to shift.

- **Landing our vision**

The vision that TDSB held for all schools in the board provided a touchstone that helped us keep focused on our goals for the school and set the tone for the process we would

Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others.

~ Jonathan Swift

take as a staff to create Kipling’s unique vision. It stated clearly that “a school’s strategy is not simply about the number of students or its EQAO scores.” Instead, “a school’s strategy is a collection of choices made by every individual in the school. Each and every school’s strategy is unique, and its choices must reflect its needs, its communities and its

goals. Principals create the conditions for shared leadership in collaboration with all learners.”

It took a full year before we could come close to landing a carefully worded vision statement. In the interim we agreed to the following which would continue to undergo updates as we moved forward:

1.1 Building a shared vision

At Kipling, we believe in nurturing the needs of the whole learner. We offer an excellent academic program integrated with modern technology, active community service and a wide range of clubs and activities. We are a small, multicultural community school prioritizing respect, dignity and understanding for each individual and the community as a whole.

Once we reached consensus among all stakeholders, especially staff and students, I felt confident about sharing these ideas with everyone – anyone who would listen. I repeated them whenever possible to the point of sounding like a broken record. It was a message to others and to myself – to keep focused and grounded about who we are and where we are headed in the short term and in future.

1.4 Communicating the vision and goals

- **Working with Staff**

As the formal positional leader in the school, my feelings of self-efficacy were important and motivated me despite an overwhelming list of priorities. I noticed early on as I began to observe and then experience staff resistance that I needed to invest in building staff buy-in and ultimately create a culture of collective efficacy – a culture of “we,” – if Kipling was to flourish.

2.1 Providing support and demonstrating consideration for staff members

- **Building trust and developing relationships**

I focused on getting everyone on board by:

- buffering staff from distractions through simplifying and where possible eliminating workload related to policies and program requirements and reporting,
- communicating clearly and often,
- acknowledging that Kipling was undergoing a tremendous amount of change all at the same time,
- building on strengths and recognizing and supporting areas for growth,
- listening and giving voice to staff concerns and input, and
- distributing and sharing leadership.

Social Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs) – perceiving emotions, managing emotions, and acting in emotionally appropriate ways

“Change does not take time – it takes commitment.”

~ Thomas Crum

This would take time and I would have to accept that not everyone on staff would commit to the future that was imagined in our vision. I also realized that there were some staff whose resistance, coupled with their deeply held beliefs about Kipling and its students, would challenge our hopes for increased equity and opportunity for all our students.

One example of this resistance was evident as we addressed the fundamental philosophy of the Student Success Program at Kipling and the introduction of Credit Recovery courses. Some staff felt that Credit Recovery had no place in senior division courses. In the discussions that took place, I shared with staff examples from neighbouring schools on how they were successfully delivering Credit Recovery. Some staff remained unconvinced. They believed that the integrity of their courses outweighed the positive outcomes that could be achieved through Credit Recovery.

Cognitive Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs) – problem-solving expertise, role-specific knowledge, and systems thinking

4.2 Providing instructional support

- **Leading the instructional program**

Despite this resistance there was enough support on staff to implement Credit Recovery. These staff agreed that it was in the best interests of our students and supported the move. With a focused and transparent approach, we moved forward

1.3 Creating high performance expectations

and introduced Credit Recovery courses successfully to the benefit of students who were underachieving.

This move led to the realization on staff that the “way we have always done things” was no longer going to be an option. I felt strongly that this and many other vital program innovations would give Kipling students access to courses that other schools offered and would also make Kipling a destination high school for more students. I also believed that these program changes would address in part Kipling’s low graduation rate, especially among boys. We needed to act, and part of the solution was offering programs that meet our students’ individual needs.

4.3 Monitoring student learning and school improvement progress

- **Distributing and sharing leadership**

I continued to focus on opening minds and at the same time looked to staffing – our current staff’s strengths and limitations. I believed that there was hidden talent on staff and that it was just a matter of bringing these talents out into the open. By channelling energies into those who saw the potential for the program changes, I discovered that there were “rock stars” who would work with me to champion the changes that would have significant payoffs for Kipling and its students. I also recruited and hired staff whose expertise was closely matched to the needs of the school and its vision of equity and excellence.

2.2 Stimulating growth in the professional capacities of staff

4.1 Staffing the instructional program

Among the staffing priorities was the need to have in place a strong formal leadership team. When I moved to Kipling there was only one vice-principal. The year that I arrived at Kipling, the second vice-principal position once allocated to the school was cancelled due to low enrolment the previous year. Looking ahead to all that was planned for the school beginning in 2017, I advocated relentlessly to have the second vice-principal position reinstated. Although I was unsuccessful in the short term, the drive to have the vice-principal position reinstated was just one dimension of my efforts to bring more staff to the leadership “table.”

To strengthen leadership in the school, another priority was to create a shared and distributed model of leadership. This meant that I would not be looked to as the only person with all the answers and instead was a principal who trusted that others could and would take the lead.

3.1 Building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership

I believed that distributing leadership would expand our pool of educators sharing new learning, solving challenging issues. and promoting questioning. There were so many benefits to sharing leadership including:

- strengthening the voice of staff,
- inspiring work in collaborative, trusting teams,
- encouraging innovation and creativity,

- infusing global competencies through authentic learning tasks,
- holding high expectations for all learners, and
- building relationships that are positive leading to increased engagement and empowerment of students, staff, parents, and the community.

I drew inspiration from leadership expert Dr. Ken Leithwood who argues that the goal in creating a culture of shared leadership and moving toward community norms, values, and expectations “depends on building trusting relationships at the local school and department level based on authentically shared and deeply held commitments about students’ futures.”

To get moving in this direction, I put in place an enhanced “position of responsibility” model that would help alleviate the demands in the school as a whole and at the same time would contribute to my goal of strengthening shared and distributed leadership.

- **Understanding the unique community context**

Sharing leadership included our work with parents and the community. I was surprised to discover that many on staff seemed to be unaware of the specific needs and unique characteristics of our school’s wider community context. This was evident in the lack of opportunities for Credit Recovery available to students in the senior grades, our unfocused Student Success program, our flawed attendance process and procedures which needed revamping, and our worrisome, low graduation rates.

I thought we needed to pause our staff conversations about student learning needs. Instead of pointing out shortcomings in our programming, I suggested that we have a focused discussion as a staff about our students, their families and the community context. This would give me an opportunity to continue to build trust and relationships and at the same time might help surface beliefs about our students and what we can expect them to achieve. It was a conversation that focused on two key questions, “what expectations do we have for all of our students, and what are the implications for the programs that the school offers?”

To support these discussions about our students, their families, and their community and, as a reality check, we invited a parent to deliver the message on behalf of our families. Following this mother’s comments, we watched a video about the Dixon area and alleged gang activity,

2.4 Building trusting relationships with and among staff, students, and parents

<https://documentaryheaven.com/this-is-dixon/> [This Is Dixon - video Dailymotion](#). We were all moved by what we viewed and heard such that there was a period of quiet and stillness at the meeting before anyone spoke about what we had just experienced. This was a promising beginning to laying the foundation for developing a shared understanding of our students and a renewed commitment to doing our best to ensure equity and excellence at Kipling.

- **Strengthening student voice and a sense of belonging**

My first meeting with students was exciting and powerful. It provided me with an opportunity to shine a light on the changes that would occur over the next few years. Although students had been provided an opportunity to express their views during the PAR, this meeting gave them a chance to tell me themselves. They had many questions and needed to hear that I was committed to following through on their suggestions. Above all they wanted a school building that they could be proud of and a school that offered programs and facilities that were available in other schools.

1.4 Communicating the vision and goals

For students who had been at Kipling prior to my arrival this was especially important. They had grown used to a building that was not student or learning friendly. There were “No Food/Drinks Allowed” signs on virtually every door in the school. There was no dedicated and appropriate space for prayer. The fitness room was old and equipment was outdated. The football field’s track was drowning in grass. I let them know that school life would be different in the coming days and months.

To back up this statement and as one small indicator of this promise, we immediately removed all the negative signage. Then as a further impactful change, we addressed the need to establish space and time for Friday and daily prayers given that 75% of our students observe Muslim faith. As an interim measure I located a dedicated space and for the first few months in 2017, I lead the prayers. Soon after, we hired a new staff member who took over the role leading prayer in a space that became the school’s dedicated multi-faith room.

2.3 Modeling the school’s values and practices

Belongingness is key to the success of any school. The ability to see yourself in the school where you spend every day for four years is significant. These are examples of small changes that showed students that we were listening and that there were more improvements to come. We wanted them to know that our doors are open to them.

- **Supporting all students with a wrap-around blanket to ensure positive outcomes**

Demonstrating and modeling inclusion at Kipling was important and with this in mind, I welcomed to Kipling two students with special needs from my previous school. My intent was to show that we as a staff have the capacity to meet the needs of all students and that we believe that all students can learn and be successful. It was a success story as both students graduated with an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) and are now pursuing college programs.

- **Engaging families and the wider school community**

My first meeting with parents and the community provided a similar opportunity to communicate what the future held for Kipling. It was heartening to see over 35 people in attendance when in the past it was usually three or four parents who attended. This turnout was especially significant because 53% of our parents are in single family households and are experiencing poverty

3.3 Building productive relationships with families and communities

and employment challenges. It was also promising since it was an important opportunity to get parents and the community engaged in Kipling's transformation.

Throughout the PAR process, the entire community had an opportunity to share what Kipling should look like in the future.

1.4 Communicating the vision and goals

I had reviewed the findings and so at this meeting I provided validation that I was committed to ensuring that the changes envisioned in the recommendations would become a reality. I talked about the important role that the School Council would play in providing support and input and about my open-door policy. I wanted parents to know that I was listening, and they could approach me with their concerns and comments.

I knew how important it was to find multiple ways to communicate that we would do whatever was needed to turn Kipling around. I also knew that it wouldn't be easy. The questions were always the same from both parents and students: "how safe is the school" and "why are your results so low?"

This was confirmed in one of the many meetings I attended in the community with the goal of sharing the good things that were happening at Kipling and the excitement of possibilities for a school that had been on the brink of closure. During this meeting, there was a truly unforgettable moment when a parent stood up and with great pride commented on how important it was to keep Kipling open. He looked at me and explained, "it means that your Kipling students don't attend my child's school." The insinuation was that if Kipling students attended his child's school, they would put the safety of his child and other students at risk. The entire room was embarrassed by these comments. For me they underscored one of the hidden challenges of my leadership and that was addressing the stigma and reputation associated with Kipling.

I informed the parent that our business at Kipling was to provide a world-class education to each one of our students and this was the goal of every school. I knew that my words would never be enough, and deep down, I recognized that the only way to get parents and the community to think differently about Kipling was to get the change happening. It needed to be concrete and visible so that our students could live it and talk about it and so that families and the community experienced it when they visited the school.

2.4 Building trusting relationships with and among staff, students, and parents

- **Essential support from our Director of Education**

Four months into the school year, I experienced what I term a "pivotal moment" that included a "pivotal person" – someone who confirmed that I was on the right track. This was the timely visit our Director of Education Dr. John Malloy made to Kipling in December 2017. By then I was running on all engines – working with staff to achieve commitment and engagement in a new and somewhat unknown future, paying attention to unrest in the community related to the proposed name change, investing in relationships, and doing outreach and marketing to increase student enrolment.

Dr. Malloy’s words helped to “lower the temperature.” His were words that stuck and motivated me to pause and think differently about the path I was on. Up to that point I was feverishly trying to accomplish an overnight turnaround which was humanly impossible. Right at that moment I began to think more about what was do-able, what I could accomplish in the short term, and what could be moved into the future. He reminded me of possibilities and the need to acknowledge the losses – one school helping students to welcome students from another school that was closing and helping those students and their families feel welcome and a sense of belonging.

At the time of his visit, renovations and upgrades were still in the early planning stages and so we decided to tour the school – its classrooms and spaces. This tour provided an opportunity to think again about leadership priorities. At times during the tour, we stopped to reflect on what we were seeing and what could be done to transform the school into a better place for our students and staff.

There was no attempt on Dr. Malloy’s part to minimize the challenges that lay ahead. He acknowledged that there was a tremendous mountain that I needed to climb to get this school on the road to success. He agreed that what it involved was massive – to the point of being overwhelming. That acknowledgement was comforting – I appreciated that he recognized and affirmed it.

Psychological  
Personal Leadership  
Resources (PLRs) –  
resilience, optimism,  
self-efficacy,  
proactivity

During our tour, we stopped at the kitchen which had been empty for five years and talked about the reasons for its closure – in particular, competition from take-out restaurants across the street in the strip mall. I explained that the impact of this closure was significant. There were a never-ending number of complaints from businesses that our students would visit during lunch hours and after school. Above all, it resulted in a missed opportunity to create a learning and supportive culture in the school when students were not in class.

Out of this conversation grew the vision of a Culinary Program for our students at Kipling, one that could be the centerpiece of its transformation. With the added new cafeteria upgrades, a new kitchen would provide opportunities to learn for students and the hopes of offering this as one of Kipling’s new Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM) programs.

A few weeks later Angela, who was a strong advocate for this idea, let me know that Dr. Malloy had approved the new Culinary Program and kitchen renovation for Kipling.

- **Building bridges with the alumni**

Although the challenge in working with Kipling’s alumni could be viewed as integral to engaging parents and the community, the issue related to PARC’s recommendation to rename Kipling emerged as unique. I was a strong supporter of the name change as I believed it would signal a new direction for Kipling and

3.4 Connecting the  
school to its wider  
environment

potentially address issues related to Kipling’s reputation. My position on the name change was very likely influenced by my background growing up in the Dixon area with extended family still living in the area.

The PARC name change recommendation included a branding overhaul with new school colours and mascots upset many in the community, especially Kipling’s alumni many of whom [expressed their anger publicly](#). They were not sold on the argument that renaming the school would spell a “fresh start” for students from both schools. They believed that it would erase their high school’s history and launched an [online petition](#) to keep the Kipling Collegiate Institute name intact. The view of the alumni group was opposed by current students and parents who argued that the name change would help build a more accepting community.

Chris Glover, who was our school Trustee at the time, stepped in to navigate the many challenges related to the pressures that seemed to come from all directions in the community. Graduates including public figures and music stars, took to social media in their campaign to preserve Kipling’s name. Throughout the process Trustee Glover provided a sense of perspective that grew into a supportive relationship with me about many aspects of the Kipling transformation.

Even though I was one of the advocates for a name change, I avoided getting embroiled in the debate and instead worked on building relationships with those who held opposing views without taking sides. The debate continued well into my first year until a vote was finally called in May 2018. After a “too-close-to-call” vote, Angela informed the Kipling community that the decision would be [deferred](#) until the beginning of the next school year, when another vote would be held. This would allow time for the students from Scarlett Heights to move and settle in at Kipling and have their say on the question of the name change. The name change issue was finally resolved in October 2018 when Kipling CI’s newly amalgamated student population voted by a 3-to-1 margin to [keep its name](#).

Social Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs) – perceiving emotions, managing emotions, and acting in emotionally appropriate ways

As it turned out building positive relationships with alumni had its benefits evident in scholarships that were secured during the process:

- A Quinn scholarship of \$5,000 per year scholarship for 4 years valued at \$20,000.00, and
- A Balsura scholarship valued at \$1,000 per year.

• **Marketing, outreach and advocacy to build enrolment**

The year-long PAR that had taken place during the previous year contributed to further enrolment decline. Families in the community assumed that the school was in jeopardy of closing and many chose to send their children to other schools. By June 2018, even though Kipling survived the closure and would integrate the students from Scarlett Heights, the future looked bleak. The damage to the school’s image in the community had been done such that Grade 9 enrolment in fall 2018 continued to plummet.

I kept in mind one overarching goal and that was to make Kipling a school that was the first choice because it provided the same opportunities and choices that neighbouring schools were offering thereby addressing inequities. An important step was to invest in marketing and outreach and in the process build relationships and trust in the community. It meant doing whatever it would take to open people's minds to believe that there were new opportunities on the horizon at Kipling.

1.4 Communicating the vision and goals

My message was the same as I did outreach: "We're listening to the student voice. Our students kept telling us 'There are all these things happening everywhere else (at other schools), why can't that stuff happen here at Kipling?' So that's what we're trying to make happen ... to change the destiny of this building."

3.4 Connecting the school to its wider environment

There were countless meetings visiting feeder school open houses, meetings with the Alumni, Richview, Kingsview and Dixon Community partners, attending community organization events, and hubs to share the word of revitalisation of Kipling. All of this paid off in the form of strengthened community relations and new partnerships with the business community who donated vouchers and gift cards and the establishment of nutrition and other school-based programs.

- **Leadership self care and well-being**

March Break 2018 had arrived, and I looked forward to leaving the city for a snowboarding vacation with my family. Little did I know that my physical well-being was absorbing the pushes and pulls of the previous months and I ended up in hospital. Although this personal illness meant that I would miss the rest of the school year while I convalesced, it didn't dissuade me from moving forward upon my return in August. In fact, I was even more determined. This included pushing back as needed to ensure that we were on track with the renovations and that promised changes would be delivered to the school and the community in a timely way.

Psychological Personal Leadership Resources (PLRs) – resilience, optimism, self-efficacy, proactivity

## **FAST FORWARD – 2018-2022: AT-A-GLANCE**

### **Fall 2018 to 2019**

- **Celebrating successes of year one**

In September 2018, I met with Angela to review progress and discuss next steps for the coming school year including welcoming students from Scarlett Heights. Angela's support never wavered. She always provided a supportive ear when things were not progressing at the pace that was agreed. Aiman Flahat, coordinating principal for LC1, provided further insight and support as he had just transformed his former school John Polanyi Collegiate. When principals are supported and shown the confidence Angela

and Aiman had in me to pursue a vision that many have said was impossible and overreaching, almost anything is possible.

At this point there were many small wins to celebrate and build on as we moved into fall 2018:

- Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM) was one of the first specialized programs we put in place to help students focus on a career path that matches their skills and interests while meeting the requirements of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD),
- An enriched Math, Science and Technology Program (MST) started September 2018 to address lack of program specialization,
- Cohort classes for compulsory grade 9, 10 were established and Grade 11 transition into Grade 12 Advanced Placement Program initiated including professional learning opportunities in Advance Placement.
- The proposal for the Culinary Program (SHSM) was approved
- Shared leadership increased as staff stepped up to establish SHSM courses and excitement for another SHSM in Arts (3 SHSMs in 3 years).

4.1 Providing instructional support

- **Continuing to manage construction, renovations and upgrades**

- In early 2018, five major projects started simultaneously which closed the cafeteria, the library, and the fitness room. This had a huge impact on the school as access to important teaching and learning supports and spaces were reduced throughout the building.
- My leadership focus shifted to minimizing daily disruptions to classroom instruction time, spending time at the strip mall being proactive in supporting the large number of students who went there during the lunch periods.
- Work on the new farm at the back of the school to support the Culinary Program was initiated and resulted in limiting student access to school grounds until its expected completion date in 2021.

3.5 Maintaining a safe and healthy school environment

- **Welcoming Scarlett Heights students and families to Kipling**

As noted previously, the PARC recommended that effective June 30, 2018, Kipling would welcome and amalgamate its student population with those of neighbouring Scarlett Heights Entrepreneurial School whose enrolment had drastically declined. Although we were given a year to prepare for this merging, I knew that the real transition would begin when the two student populations became one. Each school had



its own culture, and each had its own unique concerns related to students, their families, and the community.

As a Kipling staff we decided to set a tone of optimism and hope that would be supported by the transformation of Kipling into a new and modern teaching and learning environment.

2.3 Modeling the school's values and practices

This stance was evident in all our communications and repeated in our words and actions yearlong. The challenge in leading this merging of two student populations was intensified as it was concurrent with the renovations that were about to begin and would result in students losing access to valued facilities including many parts of the school for the entire year.

The good news was that seeing the renovations that were taking place around us – new fitness room, state-of-the-art library, culinary space, and more – had an impact on the emerging culture that was forming. It was clear to students that the changes they hoped for in the renovation were becoming a reality. Over time, before their eyes, they could see Kipling being transformed. This resulted in a feeling of hope and optimism about school life that was new and fresh for all our students – Kipling and Scarlett Heights students alike. By the end of the 2018-2019 school year, we were one – not identified as former Scarlett Heights students or as Kipling students – instead we were a united student body.



Commencement for the graduation class that year was especially bittersweet and emotional. We were saying farewell to students who had lived through a year of renovations and yet would not be with us to experience its rewards. I extended a heartfelt thank you to the class of 2019 – for their contributions and for the sacrifices they made while renovations intruded on their school experience. I reminded them that together at Kipling we experienced something special. We laid the foundations for building a strong community, with strong relationships to ensure that we're providing the best possible programming and school experience for our students.

- **Letting go of unfulfilled aspirations**

In addition to implementing the many changes recommended by the PARC and those that were specifically targeting improved achievement, equity and well-being at Kipling, there was one initiative that I believed would contribute significantly to the learning and success of our students and to Kipling's image in the city. The initiative I had in mind was the [Bryst Elite Athlete Program](#) which is a professional soccer program that provides both male and female students with an opportunity to excel at a professional level of sport and eventually be recognized by the Ontario Soccer Association. This is a

program that is tailored to school contexts and has been established in a number of TDSB schools.

I believed that it would add yet another dimension to the new Kipling. It had the potential to profile the athleticism of both our male and female students and offer a structured program that research shows translates into success in other areas of a student's performance at school and in life. I also believed that it would minimize the negative stigma associated with many of our Kipling youth and its surrounding community.

Psychological  
Personal Leadership  
Resources (PLRs) –  
resilience, optimism,  
self-efficacy,  
proactivity

I reached out to Angela making the case about the benefits of establishing this program at Kipling and initially felt encouraged that approval was possible. Although this idea represented "thinking outside the box" I felt confident about the promise it held for Kipling and its students who aspired to excel both academically and athletically.

Unfortunately, the program was not approved and even today, it represents one of my biggest disappointments as a leader at Kipling. I felt so strongly that an elite athletic program such as this could be life changing for children who would not otherwise have access to professional soccer training within the school day with no cost to the school board and nominal cost to students.

### Fall 2019 to Summer 2021

- **Making significant progress toward realizing the vision for Kipling**

At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, it felt as though our vision was slowly becoming a reality in spite of some intermittent delays in renovations. Kipling was finally open for business and we could start to reap the rewards and fruits of our labour.

With its physical transformation came a new feeling of belonging on the part of students. It has become a school that students feel is theirs and a place that reflects their hopes for the school:

- An improved gymnasium that includes sports equipment and both a fitness and weight room displaying the latest equipment,
- Basic necessities such as air conditioning, fresh paint and washroom upgrades,
- A modern cafeteria with café style tables, USB charger and lounge area that serves foods reflective of the diversity among students,
- A new Learning Commons (library),
- A prayer room, and

**New Dedicated Space  
for Prayer**



- Upgraded technology and a robotics/computer lab.

It's a school where teachers can see their hopes for their workplace come to fruition – a vision that was consistent with what their students had imagined. It's also a school where parents and the community know that their voices are heard and can see that their input has been taken into consideration.

- **Staffing and partnerships to enhance programming and student supports**

Over the four years, the opportunity to have new staff join the Kipling team enhanced and accelerated the goals of turnaround and the outcome for our school. During the first year, there were a number of staffing changes that increased diversity to reflect our student population. The overall changes were driven by student learning needs and included:

- Restructuring subject departments. With growth in enrolment, the leadership team expanded from 8 to 12 Assistant Curriculum Leaders (ACLs) distributed to support the needs of the school and success of students,
- A new ACL for Physics and Math who brought a refreshed vision,
- A new Assistant Curriculum Leader (ACL) whose focus was on special education and Student Success,
- The addition of a second vice-principal, thereby reducing the load on the two-person administration team,
- A vice-principal change mid-stream which turned into an opportunity for me to take on timetabling and get a closer pulse on programming and the need for further restructuring,
- Hiring of motivated teachers who are now Advanced Placement certified to teach new courses in 2022 to include Psychology, English, Calculus and Biology,
- Provision of increased mental health supports,
- Recruitment of three new counsellors from school staff, one Child and Youth Worker (CYW), a Graduating Coach for Black students and one Settlement Worker,
- A School Based Safety Monitor who brought a strong, vigilant, and intensive presence,
- Hiring three teachers who are Kipling alumni,
- Increased involvement of parents in the school day who provided homemade breakfasts each morning,
- A new chef to lead the Culinary Program, and
- Staff who supported the start-up of the Muslim Student Association Club.

4.1 Staffing the instructional program

Added to staffing changes were partnerships established to enhance programming and supports for students including:

- Pathways to Education and [The STEPS to Excellence Step+](#) that serves youth from the Kingsview Village-The Westway neighbourhood who are in Grades 9-11 and attend Kipling and encompasses a broad range of focus areas including academic support, mentoring, youth development, arts, sports and recreation,
- After school mentorship and tutoring for all students,

- Youth of Africa/LBGTQ+ clubs and programs launched to support well-being and belongingness.

- **Establishing academic pathways**

We recognized the importance of having students enrolled in academic courses beyond Grade 10, so they have access to increased post-secondary pathway options (college, university, apprenticeship and workplace), and achieve greater success in post-secondary programs.

With this in mind, the following are examples of improvements to the academic program:

- Beginning 2019, Kipling staff established Professional Learning Teams specifically to support students to meet the expectations in academic courses,
- Professional Development and Learning started in order to prepare for Academic Pathways (resistance) and Advanced Placement,
- Four staff members have completed certification for Advanced Placement courses and will add to the line up choices that students will choose from in the future,
- Staff worked toward aligning course offerings and as of September 2020, we were successful in completely transitioning to academic pathways. All students are enrolled in academic levels in all compulsory grade 9 courses,
- Teachers of special education programs in partnership with educational assistants and Student Success teachers worked with classroom teachers to develop and implement specific strategies to help students meet program expectations,
- Three SHSMs are now available to students in ICT, Arts and the Culinary Program,
- The school improvement implementation team communicate specific support programs to the community, along with how students/parents/guardians can access the support they need,
- Smaller cohorts are put in place ensuring that teachers with relevant expertise are assigned to teach in the academic pathway,
- Teachers support the learning of students with special education needs by providing the accommodations and modifications outlined in the student's individual education plans (IEPs). In limited circumstances, additional course choices are available to students,
- Switched over to academic pathways completely in midst of COVID – success with small class sizes remarkable
- Year one results for Academic Pathways were impressive: CGC1D1 – 89% pass rate, END1D1 – 95% pass rate, MPM1D1 – 95% pass rate, and SNC1D1 – 93% pass rate,
- Programs pre-COVID are up and running and our graduation rates have grown from 55% to 85% - still three years from where we want to be.

4.2 Providing instructional support

4.3 Monitoring student learning and school improvement progress

- **Building relationships around the world**

Every year the TDSB welcomes students from around the world to experience our leading Kindergarten to Grade 12 educational programs. These students travel from over 60 different countries, bringing rich cultural practices, languages and traditions to our schools. Kipling expressed interest and had the opportunity to host the Shenyang, China Cultural Immersion Program in December 2019. This was a short-term cultural immersion program from Shenyang, China when a group of 15 high school students and two chaperon teachers joined us for a three-week period. The impact was ten-fold both for our guests and the student body at Kipling. Kipling now provides the International Visa Student Program on an annual basis.

- **Tracking progress on construction and renovations**

It is with great pride and some relief, that I can put in writing a long list of the renovations that have been completed to date:

- In spring 2021, the final steps of a fully functional farm built in the back of the school has become reality. We have planted a garden and hopefully will reap the fruits of this gardening for our Culinary Program and more specifically the salad bar in September,
- Main foyer upgrades will surely put the icing on the cake as it is expected they will create an impressive welcoming entrance in time for school reopening September 2021,
- The new Daycare construction is planned to start any day and will add a fresh dynamic to the halls of Kipling. With our new childcare partners, activities and celebrations of children in the early years will bring laughter and joy to the building,
- The upgrades to the outside of the building have transformed Kipling into a central meeting place for neighbours and students. Throughout the pandemic, the fields and track have been fully occupied and played an important role in mitigating the impact of COVID restrictions on the mental health and well-being of our families,
- The new kitchen/Culinary Program continues to operate offering hot breakfasts for all students each day and lunches prepared by students each day. The positive impact of a bustling and fully occupied cafeteria was significant especially in reducing the number of issues across the street at the strip mall. It's important to reiterate that getting the cafeteria to this point wasn't about getting something new and different, it was about giving our students access to services that every other high school already had.

- **Continuing parent and community engagement and outreach**

Our families and school community continue to express their appreciation. They too are reaping the rewards of patience when construction was halted, and renovations delayed. The work on my part to continue outreach in the community and with feeder schools continues.

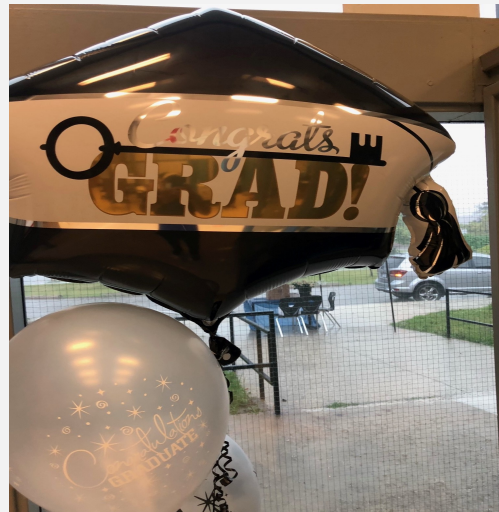
- **Leading in a pandemic**

Now, in the context of a pandemic, the importance of optimism, fostering teamwork and being present has never been so crucial. At a time, when social distancing and wearing masks are the norm, the ability to ensure best outcomes for students remains the goal.

The following are some of the actions I took to accomplish this goal:

- Focusing on taking care of the people who take care of the students,
- Listening to staff as we have navigated, pivoted and showed flexibility eventually closing the library in order to provide support to other programs in the school,
- Ongoing maneuvering and restructuring of the timetable to support students and staff in ways that ensure there is coherence in programming and high expectations are upheld. The quadmester timetable has been challenging at the best of times and has placed new demands on our teachers – an impact that must be recognized,
- Providing additional supports including booking occasional teachers to provide breaks,
- Integrating on-line supports with *STEPS to Excellence*,
- Keeping the school safe by strictly adhering to Toronto Public Health protocols,
- Ensuring that everyone is on the same page through intense and continuous communication via email, social media, school messenger, and a weekly newsletter for parents and staff,
- Enhancing support levels in the guidance office – especially with student mental health – with help from the Ministry’s Graduating Coach for Black Students
- Addressing unique community needs, e.g. supporting Muslim Student Associations and hosting Somali Heritage Month celebrations,
- Supporting students in the Culinary Program who made grab and go meals including daily morning breakfasts for the entire student body,
- Maintaining the Pantry from Toronto Foundation for Student Success that provides food for those in need by picking up food for the community on a daily basis.
- Supporting the voice of our students who requested a small request to end the year with a Grad Drive-Up Ceremony to officially mark the end of high school.

**2021 Grad Drive-Up Ceremony:  
Grads Weathered the Rain to  
Participate**



## REFLECTING ON THE KIPLING JOURNEY TO TRANSFORMATION

### Some Leadership Lessons

In my view, the primary motivator and purpose of school-level leadership is to do

“Grit: passion and perseverance over very long periods of time”

~ Angela Duckworth

everything possible to help students achieve success with the best possible outcomes. This means drawing on all human and material resources possible including my own expertise and internal capacity. There are so many lessons learned on

this journey that have resulted in my learning and growth as a leader.

The two that stand out among others are:

1. Having perseverance, resilience, and determination or what some refer to as “grit,” are qualities that I have added to my resume – it is who I am as a leader and these traits emerged as essential, and
2. Engaging skillfully in courageous conversations continuously to move Kipling in the right direction and work towards transforming it into a place that is valued by all who are a part of it.

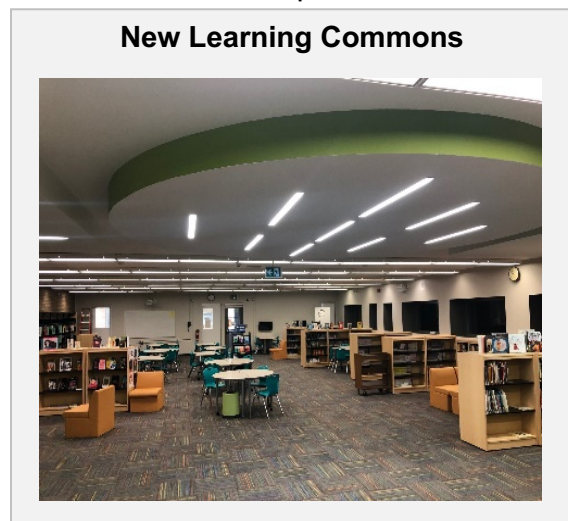
3.1 Building collaborative cultures and distributing leadership

It takes a strong team with a commitment for the best outcomes for students and it is a team effort – not one I could as the formal leader accomplish on my own. The Kipling team has embraced the vision and taken many risks to achieve amazing results over a short period of time.

The transformation feels like a validation for our school community and students on how we could together make Kipling special – a space tailored to the uniqueness of our students. The new kitchen now hosts our very popular SHSM Culinary Program. The Robotics Lab has allowed students to imagine and create in the new SHSM Integrated Communication Technology Program.

Among the many changes a few stand out as monumental. Prior to COVID-19, the newly designed Weight Training/Fitness Room was the busiest space throughout the day. The modern design supported accessibility with an elevator so all students can enjoy it.

The Learning Commons has been humming with action whether it's accessing the new technology on the café style tables or utilizing the makerspace area which includes 3D printers and the latest gadgets to support student learning. It's a true learning hub within the school environment and the students at Kipling are so proud of it!



**GO WILDKATS GO!**