

Forming our Catholic Vision for Learning in the 21st Century

An overview for parents, guardians and students

June 2013

Our vision of education in Dufferin-Peel Catholic schools is rooted in the gospel values of faith, hope and love. Guided by this vision, which is deliberately infused into all aspects of our strategic planning and operations, Dufferin-Peel schools strive to embrace the new realities of our rapidly changing world, while upholding our Catholic faith traditions.

Within these complex new 21st century realities, with variables such as globalization, the economy, environmental challenges, technological advances and increasing cultural diversity, we face the challenge of preparing our students to live, to lead, to prosper, and to fulfill their potential as Catholic school graduates, who are responsible and thriving global and digital citizens. These are exciting times in which to both teach and to learn!

We recognize and understand that students have different skills, knowledge and experiences and quite simply, they learn in different ways. Over the past year, senior Dufferin-Peel staff had the opportunity to explore, more deeply, the concept of learning in the 21st century. This included a detailed discussion on the 'Why', the 'What', and the 'How' of learning in the 21st century in the context of our Catholic faith. Based on these discussions a number of common concepts were identified as key learning skills, competencies and dispositions: that will be part of our Catholic context and connection to the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations.

From our analysis and discussion we must now strive to ensure that our Dufferin-Peel Catholic education system focuses on student achievement and well being for all through what we believe in and how we demonstrate our beliefs.

Caritas in Veritate: Charity in Truth – Love, discerning believers and caring community members.

Citizenship: Called to action in solidarity and stewardship.

Communication: Listening and responding critically and compassionately within gospel values.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving: Creating, inquiring, and responsible decision making.

Collaboration: Building relationships in communion with all human beings.

Creativity and Innovation: Demonstrating resiliency, flexibility and adaptability in finding the path to vocation and lifelong learning.

Based on the feedback from our consultations with various stakeholder groups, several broad themes and understandings have been identified. These will guide our planning and practice going forward:

- Faith nurturing and development
- Global/local issues and stewardship within a Catholic view
- Infusion of faith in our learning spaces
- Sacred spaces that promote active reflection and prayer
- Student-led learning, higher order thinking and collaborative inquiry
- Relevant real world contexts and/or experiential learning
- Varied evidence-based strategies for instruction and assessments
- Creative design of flexible learning spaces responsive to student needs
- Student voice and engagement
- Collaborative professional learning and instructional leadership
- Technological and digital literacy
- Community, parish and parent engagement
- Evidence-informed decision making

Although we have already explored some possibilities for what we need our schools to do, the possibilities really are endless, both from teaching and learning perspectives. Our 21st century learning and teaching journey is a dynamic and ever-expanding process. It is a process that will unfold in many phases and in many forms over the coming months and years. We will be exploring multiple technologies, including digital, internet, use of tablets and other devices, as well as the wireless technology (Wi-Fi) necessary to facilitate the use of these devices. Technology not only allows us to link to the global community, but also provides greater accessibility and use for students for whom these tools are essential for learning.

In fact, one of the next phases on our 21st century journey will be related to technology; specifically, the introduction of wireless technology into our schools. Wireless technology is already literally all around us. It is prevalent in our homes, automobiles, workplaces, where we shop, where we get our coffee.... you name it and chances are that wireless technology is there. Initially, one of the areas we will focus on will be the use of wireless technology as one of the teaching support tools we can use to benefit student learning.

Earlier this year, we initiated a pilot project utilizing wireless technology in four schools (two elementary and two secondary) and the board's Catholic Education Centre. As part of the pilot, we engaged an environmental consultant to

test radiowave frequencies in the pilot sites. Tests were conducted both with WiFi turned on and again, with WiFi turned off. In fact, the highest measured location was only 3% of the Health Canada Code 6 standard (in other words, 97% better than the Code 6 standard). The results with the WiFi turned off were only marginally lower than when it was turned on. We are looking to have wireless technology installed in all our schools by the fall.

We are aware of, and respect the fact that some parents and guardians in other school districts have expressed reservations about health and safety in relation to the introduction of wireless technology in schools. The health and safety of our students and staff is paramount to us. As we do with all health-related matters, we take direction from our local and national health authorities; in our case, Peel Health, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Health Unit and Health Canada. Each of these health authorities take the position that the available scientific evidence indicates that exposure to Wi-Fi in schools is not harmful to the health of students and staff. Please be assured that we are approaching this in a focused, planned and measured manner, in compliance with Health Canada standards and in conjunction with other components of 21st century learning.

This is an exciting time for our students and staff, and we hope for you as parents/guardians as well. The concept of learning is grounded in knowledge; how we construct and acquire it, interact with it and how we share and create communities of practice with it. We need to collaborate, not just with peers, but with people all over the world. In doing so, we advance knowledge, share our talents and gifts and make changes that serve the greater common good.

For more information on Dufferin-Peel's vision for 21st Century Learning, visit our website at www.dpcdsb.org and read the recent report to the board called ***Forming our Catholic Vision for Learning in the 21st Century***.