



Leading Edge

From the desk of **Ken Thurston, Director of Education**

June 25, 2010

There is a growing body of research showing that a sustained positive school climate predicts multiple key outcomes—academic achievement, teacher retention, students' healthy development, and violence prevention. We also have the tools that allow schools to systematically measure climate; however a gap still exists in what we know and what we do. Creating a positive school climate doesn't happen by accident. It requires intentionality, conscientious reflection, integration, and gathering of data that not only measure climate but also support school improvement efforts.

~ ASCD Whole Child website

REFLECTIONS ON OUR PRACTICE

Well Being

As promised, I've returned this week to the challenge of focussing our thinking and our energies on well being. To spark my thinking, I put out a few feelers to see what individuals and groups in our system know about the topic and what is currently going on. All I can say is, "Wow!" Clearly this is a topic that is current in the minds of students, staff and parents. And many great things are underway. Our employee groups are addressing the health and wellness of their members as standing agenda items. Many of our system departments have built monitoring of wellness into their department plans. Almost all schools have initiatives underway to enhance student engagement and well being.

Here are a few of my observations and conclusions based on the ideas I've gleaned to date:

- It is essential to address the well being of both students and adults in our classrooms and workplaces.
- While we may have less direct responsibility for and influence over family and community well being, we can and must work in collaboration with others in this regard in order to meet our goals.
- The ultimate goal is to build resiliency in our students, families, employees and communities. We need to strengthen our collective capacity to embrace change and cope well with difficult situations.
- Research supports what we instinctively know - engaged learners and workers perform better and find their learning and work more rewarding.
- Well being can serve as the needed connector among various "initiatives" including safe and supportive schools, equity and inclusivity; student engagement, healthy schools and respectful workplaces.
- Well being can readily serve as a catalyst for pulling together the efforts of all of the key stakeholders in our Board.
- We're doing many things right but we would benefit by sharing more; working from common understandings and terminology and celebrating our successes.

As a first step, let's remember to take time over the summer months to rest and renew. Enjoy your friends, family and outdoor activities when you can. While not all of us can put up our feet for the summer, I encourage everyone to take maximum advantage of the season to focus on personal well being and consider the ways it can be brought to life in supporting our mission.

On a personal note, I'd like to thank you for supporting my well being and that of our students over the past six months and to offer my best wishes for a safe and successful summer season.

Contact: **Erin Bain, Communications Officer, Ext. 2520**



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FOCUS ON STUDENTS AND STAFF

As we move towards a definition and understanding of well being, many of our schools are recognizing, supporting and enhancing “well being” through respectful environments and relationships, social and emotional supports and safe and healthy environments:

Healthy School Celebration



Over 130 schools across our region attended a *Healthy Schools Celebration* on May 21 to learn how other communities have established a healthier school/workplace environment. Through a targeted community action plan, school teams are involved in bringing the [Healthy Schools and Workplaces](#) policy to life while continuing to build partnership support and opportunities that benefit the school community at large. In addition, the Ministry of Education has presented 93 of our schools with a banner, plaque and letter of appreciation for their submissions to the [Healthy Schools Recognition Program](#) this year.

Staff and community members are also beginning to explore the possibility of launching a *Network for Healthy Workplaces*. It is our vision that with the support of strong community relations, all schools within the Board will provide a comprehensive healthy school and workplace climate.

Garden Collective



For the past several months, the primary students at **Carrville Mills PS** have been exploring the theme of *Seeds and Gardens* through their drama and dance classes. The students looked at seeds as a metaphor for growth and the conditions that allow that growth to happen. The result of that exploration was a student generated dance/drama collective that was shared with the parents on June 16th. It was an evening of dance, drama, and music where each student played an important role.

First Nation Cultural Awareness Day



On June 11, the York Region District School Board, in partnership with the Chippewas of Georgina Island, hosted a First Nation Cultural Awareness Day, '*Zhi-noomadiying ezhi-anishinaabewiying*', *Sharing Our Culture*. The intent of the day was to foster a positive and culturally accurate image of a local First Nation community. Students, educators, and the community at large were provided with a basic introduction to aboriginal teachings, music, regalia, food, dance, and the

Georgina Island retrospective photo gallery. 110 elementary and secondary students, plus teachers and administrators travelled across Lake Simcoe on the island ferry, the Aazhaawe.

The event provided an opportunity for our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Student Leadership Council to play an integral role in assisting with the day's activities. All participants gained knowledge and awareness from the experience which was an excellent preface to *National Aboriginal Day* (June 21). The day's activities ended with the War Eagle Drummers playing a round dance where everyone participated.



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Excellence Awards for Tamil Students

The Excellence Awards for Tamil students, "UUKKAMATHU KAIVIDALE" (persevere and strive to reach your true potential), was held on June 8th at **Middlefield CI**. This pilot project was designed to support and recognize students of Tamil heritage who have been successful in a variety of categories and included students from the Middlefield and Milliken Mills family of schools. This event was organized by Tamil educators of YRDSB in partnership with Markham Tamil Organization and the Community and Cultural Services Unit of YRDSB and attended by the school trustee, superintendent as well as principals, teachers, parents and community partners.



Fire Safety



Students from **Vaughan SS** recently visited **Brownridge PS** to share a message about fire safety. Students presented a public service video they had created, with the cooperation of Vaughan Fire Service, to the Grade 5 - 8 classes at Brownridge. The Brownridge PS community appreciated the opportunity for former students to return and share their learning with their students. Based on the success of this venture, the administrations of both schools are looking forward to developing further connections for the schools.

"Who is Nobody"

Grade 8 students at **Ramer Wood PS** embraced the "[Who is Nobody](#)" program that was made available to them through the Rotary Club. "Nobody," who arrived in September as a featureless, denim doll was taken home with one student each week who then had to perform good works that would benefit people, animals or the environment. Some examples of the good deeds included a student who cleaned up a neighbouring park, students who contributed to relief efforts in Haiti or who donated clothes to the needy or money to worthy causes. With each good deed, the students were asked to affix to the doll an accessory that was reminiscent of the good work they had done.

Throughout the year, "Nobody" gained clothes, sunglasses, shoes and a bandana while students gained a sense of purpose. As the students gave presentations outlining their good deeds, every member of the class realized that "everybody" was "somebody."

EcoSchools Certification



From zero to one hundred and two certified schools in just four years!

By creating an inclusive school team focussed on environmental sustainability, schools provide opportunities for students to develop the intellectual courage to seek answers, think critically, and develop a global awareness. Through their involvement with their school's EcoTeam, students, staff and community members have felt empowered to have a voice and to make a difference.

Schools and school boards play a vital role in keeping the natural environment healthy for future generations. The well-being of our students is closely connected to the well-being of the Earth. The EcoTeam would like to thank all 102 schools for their hard work and dedication in the pursuit of ecological literacy and in achieving certification status.



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FUNDRAISERS AND DONATIONS UPDATE

- The *Me-to-We Club* at **Rogers PS** was founded in 2008 to support a clean well and sanitation project for a village in India through *Free the Children*. On June 23rd, students were thrilled to attend a function in Newmarket, where Craig Kielburger was the guest speaker. The students' hard work was rewarded as they were able to present the cheque to Mr. Kielburger personally. These students demonstrate commitment to improving lives and well being locally and globally and are true citizens of character.
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- A group of students and a man are standing together. One student is holding a large cheque, and another student is presenting it to the man. They are all smiling and appear to be at a formal event.
- Intermediate students at **H. G. Bernard PS** organized and ran a *Wii Care* fundraiser to benefit Haiti. Students donated \$2.50 to participate in the *Wii Bowling and Tennis Challenge*. Students had the opportunity to play the games over several days during recesses. Junior/Intermediate students offered their assistance to teachers for one day for a fee to raise money. The teachers provided a donation in return for their help. A school-wide assembly was held to educate and inspire all students to support these initiatives. Students in art classes created posters to raise awareness of the cause.
 - While reading Eric Walters' novel, *Alexandria of Africa*, the Grade 6/7 students at **Aldergrove PS** realized that they wanted to help out a poor African village. After promoting the event through posters and announcements, students sold dozens of gently used books, treats, as well as 600 samosas. Students were able to reach their fundraising goal for the Kenyan community, as well as raising extra to support Haiti earthquake victims. Alexandria's lesson of "thinking of others before herself" was put into action in the classroom. Mr. Walters also took the time to come by the classroom to pick up the cheque in person, and to chat with the kids about the projects going on in Africa, as well as answering their questions about the process of writing novels.
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- A group of students are gathered in a classroom. Some are standing around a table, while others are sitting. They appear to be engaged in a group activity or discussion.
- On June 4th the Athletic Council of **Keswick HS** held its second *Relay for Life*. Over 340 students and staff came early and set up their team tent sites on the athletic field - raring to go and fight back against cancer. The Opening Ceremonies were followed by the *Survivor Lap* which kicked off 12 hours of activity, fun, food and games. The goal of having at least one member of the team walking or running around the track throughout the 12 hour event was met despite the rain and lightning. Together, the students and staff gave up one night of their lives in the hope that it will add years to the lives of others while shattering last year's fundraising record.
 - **Keswick HS** has been publicly recognized by Canadian Blood Services' (CBS) *National Blood Donor Week*. CBS has been very pleased with the students' ongoing commitment to their community and selected Keswick HS to represent how Canadian youth are getting involved in the saving of lives.



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FUTURE EVENTS

Quest 2010: Engaging Learning in the 21st Century-The Preconference



The Quest Preconference on November 17, themed *What Are You Doing in School Today* will be an opportunity to reflect on student learning in the 21st Century.

- How does your approach support the development of 21st century skills, and the habits of mind necessary for our students to be independent, productive, responsible, action-oriented, caring and happy/successful citizens of their world?
- How is your approach inclusive of all students?
- How are students included in the planning, implementation and assessment of your work with them?

David Booth will be the facilitator for the day. Sheryl Nussbaum-Beach, Co-Founder and CEO of Powerful Learning Practice, along with Jowi Taylor will be wonderful resources for the day. However, the most important 'resource' for the Quest Preconference will be the students who will be visibly involved throughout as workshop presenters, panellists and active participants. A number of schools have already identified two of their students and the Quest Preconference is expected to be near capacity by November.

A reminder that the costs for registration at Quest will go up on Friday, September 10th when the Early Bird Registration ends.

DID YOU KNOW....

...that the **Canadian Index of Wellbeing** (Time Crunch) and the **Vacation Deprivation Survey** results were released this month:



- More Canadians are working more non-standard hours (29%)
- More Canadians are time crunched (19.6%)
- More Canadians are providing care to an elderly dependent (27.8%)
- More Canadians are providing care to an elderly dependent and children (6.8%)
- 47% of Canadians described themselves as being vacation deprived which is the highest level in 4 years
- Employed Canadians aged 25-44 are the most likely to feel vacation deprived (55%)
- 24% of Canadians are not using up all of their allotted vacation time
- 30% of Canadians admit to checking work messages while on vacation
- 22% have cancelled or postponed vacation plans in the past because of work

The trends suggest that Canadians are increasingly sacrificing satisfying and meaningful relaxation and leisure time in order to attend to the more pressing demands of work, childcare and looking after dependent seniors.

We know that healthy and high-achieving staff creates the conditions for healthy and high-achieving students. Let's all work to build balance into our schedules in a deliberate and planned way. Make sure you set aside time to spend with family and friends as well as pursuing your interests over the summer.

I wish you all a restful summer!

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