



Committee of the Whole Meeting

Date: Monday, October 5, 2026.

Time: **6:15 p.m.**

** Committee of the Whole In Camera, if necessary, will precede or follow the Board Meeting, as appropriate.*

Location: 1st floor Board Room, Catholic Education Centre, 35 Weber Street West, Kitchener

Attendees:

Board of Trustees:

Linda Cuff, Kathy Doherty-Masters, Winston Francis, David Guerin, Renée Kraft (Chair), Marisa Phillips, Robert Sikora, Conrad Stanley, Tracey Weiler (Vice-Chair)

Student Representatives:

Rashid Abu Ghazaleh, Brayden Thompson

Senior Administration:

Patrick Eby, Jordan Figueiredo, Gerald Foran, Shesh Maharaj, Angela McHardy, Paul Mendonça, Kerry Pomfret, Jennifer Ritsma, Annalisa Varano

Special Resource:

Recording Secretary:

Stephanie Medeiros

ITEM	Who	Agenda Section	Method & Outcome
1. Call to Order	Board Chair		
1.1 Opening Prayer & Memorials (previously offered at Special Board)	Board of Trustees	--	--
1.2 Territorial Acknowledgement I (we) would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather today is the land traditionally cared for by the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and Chonnonton People. I (we) also acknowledge the enduring presence and deep traditional knowledge, laws and philosophies of the Indigenous People with whom we share this land today. (previously offered at Special Board)	Board Chair	--	--
1.3 Approval of Agenda	Board of Trustees		Approval
1.4 Declaration of Pecuniary Interest 1.4.1 From the current meeting 1.4.2 From a previous public or in-camera meeting	Individual Trustees		
1.5 Items for Action:			
2. Consent Agenda: Director of Education			

ITEM	Who	Agenda Section	Method & Outcome
(e.g.: operational matters from the Ministry of Education that the Board is required to do; update on the system)			
3. Consent Agenda: Board (Minutes of meetings)			
3.1 Approval of Minutes of Regular and Special Meetings 3.1.1 Committee of the Whole Minutes – May 11, 2026 3.2 Trustee Work Plan	Board of Trustees Chair	pp. 4-7 --	Approval Information
4. Delegations			
5. Advice from the CEO 5.1 Pastoral Plan 5.2 Student Achievement Plan (SAP) 5.3 Equity Action Plan 5.4 Well-Being Plan Update	P. Mendonça J. Ritsma J. Figueiredo/ L. Garrioch G. Foran	pp. 8-16 pp. 17-21 pp. 22-25 pp. 26-32	Information Information Information Information
6. Ownership Linkage (Communication with the External Environment related to Board's Annual Agenda; ownership communication)			
6.1 Linkages Activity 6.2 Pastoral Care Activity	Trustees Trustees	-- --	Discussion Discussion
7. Reports from Board Committees/Task Forces			
8. Board Education (at the request of the Board)			
8.1 OCSTA/CCSTA Communications OCSTA/CCSTA Communications Link	Board of Trustees	Link	Information
9. Policy Discussion (Based on Annual Plan of Board Work)			
10. Assurance of Successful Board Performance (monitoring)			
10.1 Work of the Board Priorities	Chair	--	Discussion
11. Assurance of Successful Director of Education Performance (monitoring)			
12. Potential Agenda Items/Shared Concerns/Report on Trustee Inquiries			
13. Announcements			
13.1 Upcoming Meetings/Events (all scheduled for the Catholic Education Centre unless otherwise indicated): - Oct 7, 8, 15 - Secondary Academic Awards Nights - Oct 26 – PD day – Spiritual Development - Nov 5 – SEAC Meeting - Nov 6 & 13 – St. Louis Graduations - Nov 10 – Audit Committee - Nov 11 - Remembrance Day - Nov 16 – Inaugural Election Chair/Vice-Chair & PD Day	Chair	--	Information

ITEM	Who	Agenda Section	Method & Outcome
14. Items for the Next Meeting Agenda	Trustees		
14.1 Board of Trustees Meeting: (October 19, 2026) • EQAO Report • Audit Committee Annual Report • Student Trustee Report • Chair of the Board Report • CEO's Report	Chair	--	Information
15. Adjournment/ Confirm decisions made tonight	Director of Education		
15.1 Confirm Decisions	Recording Secretary	--	Information
16. Closing Prayer			
16.1 Closing Prayer	All		
17. Motion to Adjourn	Board of Trustees	Motion	Approval

CLOSING PRAYER

O Risen Lord, you have entrusted us with the responsibility to help form a new generation of disciples and apostles through the gift of our Catholic schools.

As disciples of Christ, may we educate and nurture hope in all learners to realize their full potential to transform God's world.

May our Catholic schools truly be at the heart of the community, fostering success for each by providing a place for all.

May we and all whom we lead be discerning believers formed in the Catholic faith community; effective communicators; reflective and creative thinkers; self-directed, responsible, life-long learners; collaborative contributors; caring family members; and responsible citizens.

Grant us the wisdom of your Spirit so that we might always be faithful to our responsibilities. We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.

Amen

Rev. Charlie Fedy, CR and the Board of Trustees, 2010



Committee of the Whole Meeting

A public meeting of the Committee of the Whole was held Monday, May 11, 2026, 1st floor Board Room, Catholic Education Centre, 35 Weber Street West, Kitchener.

Trustees Present:

Linda Cuff, Kathy Doherty-Masters, Winston Francis, David Guerin*, Renée Kraft (Chair), Marisa Phillips, Robert Sikora, Conrad Stanley, Tracey Weiler (Vice-Chair)

Student Trustees Present:

Rebecca Girolametto, Jace Krysko

Administrative Officials Present:

Patrick Eby, Gerald Foran, Shesh Maharaj, Paul Mendonça, Judy Merkel, Kerry Pomfret, Annalisa Varano, Jennifer Ritsma

*- joined via Teams

Special Resources For The Meeting:

Regrets:

Absent:

Recorder:

Stephanie Medeiros, Executive Administrative Assistant

NOTE ON VOTING: Under Board by-law 4.7, when a decision is reached by consensus, the minutes of the Meeting shall indicate a decision by consensus with the notation in the minutes that consensus means the decision was supported by all Trustees present and eligible to vote on a matter. Under Board by-law 4.11 Whenever a vote is required, every Trustee present when a vote is taken, including the Chair but excluding any Trustee who has declared a direct or indirect pecuniary interest as required by the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, shall vote on all questions on which the Trustee is entitled to vote and abstentions are not permitted.

1. Call to Order:

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

1.1 Opening Prayer & Memorials

Prayer led by Vice-Chair Weiler.

1.2 Territorial Acknowledgement

Territorial Acknowledgement declared by Chair Kraft.

1.3 Approval of Agenda

Chair Kraft motioned for approval of the agenda.

**2026-15 -- It was moved by Trustee Stanley and seconded by Trustee Francis:
THAT the agenda for Monday, May 11, 2026, be now approved.**

--- Carried by consensus

1.4 Declaration of Pecuniary Interest

1.4.1 From the current meeting – NIL

1.4.2 From a previous public or in-camera meeting – NIL

1.5 Items for Action - NIL

2. Consent Agenda: Director of Education (e.g., day-to-day operational matters from the Ministry of Education that the board is required to do)

3. Consent Agenda: Board of Trustees (Minutes of meetings)

3.1 Approval of Minutes of Regular and Special Meetings

3.1.1 Committee of the Whole Minutes – Apr 13, 2026

Chair Kraft motioned for approval of the consent agenda.

2026-16 -- It was moved by Trustee Sikora and seconded by Trustee Weiler

THAT the Consent Agenda: Board of Trustees and the recommendations contained therein be now approved.

--- Carried by consensus

4. Delegations

5. Advice From the CEO

5.1 Innovation

Superintendent Merkel introduced Katrina Gouett and Whitney McKinley, Student Achievement Consultants for Learning and Innovation, who presented the Innovation report. The presentation outlined the Deep Learning Framework, emphasizing five pillars that promote inclusive, student-centered learning in alignment with Catholic values. Initiatives like STREAM Week, the Innovation Action Network, and esports were reviewed. Additionally, system-wide professional development aimed at enhancing AI literacy among educators was highlighted. Trustees asked clarifying questions.

5.2 Long Term Accommodation Plan Presentation

Superintendent Maharaj introduced Jennifer Passy, Manager of Planning, to present the Long-Term Accommodation Plan report. The report outlined the board's reporting obligations and examined demographic trends within the regional context. It detailed the projection methodology and key assumptions, focusing on the elementary and secondary panel's enrollment and utilization rates. The report also addressed approved capital priorities and immediate-term objectives, summarizing key findings and strategic actions. Trustees asked clarifying questions.

5.3 Safe Schools Update

Superintendent Merkel introduced Carla Santomero, Principal of Safe Schools, and Courtney Brewer, Research Coordinator, who presented the Safe Schools Update, including student well-being and school climate data, suspension trends, and restorative and student-led safety initiatives. Trustees asked clarifying questions.

6. Ownership Linkage (Communication with the External Environment)

6.1 Linkages Activity

Trustee Sikora provided an update on the Linkages Activity, noting engagement with Trustees during Catholic Education Week. Concerns were raised regarding event expenses. It was suggested that staying more locally may help manage expenses. Additionally, there was discussion about increasing involvement in student events, including enhancing recognition at graduation ceremonies and improving social media presence.

6.2 Pastoral Care Activity

Vice-Chair Weiler provided an update on Pastoral Care initiatives, there was discussion around the various events Trustees attended during Catholic Education Week as well as a desire to observe more volunteer opportunities for trustees.

7. Reports From Board Committees/Task Forces

8. Board Education (at the request of the Board)

8.1 OCSTA/CCSTA Communications

Chair Kraft briefly discussed OCSTA/CCSTA Communications.

8.2 Trustee and Student Trustee Evaluations

Chair Kraft invited Trustees to share feedback on the Trustee Evaluation. Trustees expressed a shared commitment to continued growth and identified priorities for professional development in governance, strategic planning, and faith formation. Suggestions included welcoming a variety of Catholic speakers to future sessions and pursuing learning opportunities related to recent legislative changes.

**2026-17 -- It was moved by Trustee Sikora and seconded by Trustee Weiler
THAT the meeting be extended past 3 hours.**

--- Carried by consensus

8.3 Trustee Work Plan – May-August review

Chair Kraft reviewed the Trustee Work Plan for the months of May-August.

9. Policy Discussion

10. Assurance of Successful Board Performance

11. Assurance of Successful Director of Education Performance

12. Potential Agenda Items

13. Announcements (all scheduled for the Catholic Education Centre unless otherwise indicated)

13.1 Upcoming Meetings/Events

The Chair noted upcoming events.

14. Items for the Next Meeting Agenda/Pending Items

14.1 The Chair noted upcoming items on the next agenda.

15. Adjournment – Confirm decisions made tonight.

15.1 Confirm Decisions

The Recording Secretary confirmed the meeting decisions.

16. Closing Prayer

16.1 Closing prayer led by all.

17. Motion to Adjourn

**2026-18 -- It was moved by Trustee Stanley and seconded by Trustee Weiler:
THAT the meeting be now adjourned. The meeting was adjourned by consensus at 9:08 p.m.**

Chair of the Board

Secretary



Date: October 5, 2026
To: Board of Trustees
From: Chief Executive Officer
Subject: Pastoral Plan Update

Type of Report:

- ☐ Decision-Making
- ☐ Monitoring
- ☒ Incidental Information concerning day-to-day operations

Type of Information:

- ☐ Information for Board of Trustees Decision-Making
- ☐ Monitoring Information of Board Policy **XX XXX**
- ☒ Information only of day-to-day operational matters delegated to the CEO

Origin: (cite Education Act and/or Board Policy or other legislation)

Board Governance Policy I:001 Ends

Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations (OCSGE, 2011): [Institute for Catholic Education]

Policy Statement and/or Education Act/other Legislation citation:

Administrative Policy (APA001): Elementary Admissions

Administrative Policy (APA002): Secondary Admissions

Alignment to the MYSP:

☐ **Learning**

- ☒ Support multiple pathways & tools for success
- ☐ Accelerate excellence & innovation while building transferable, future-ready skills
- ☐ Engage students as co-creators in their learning
- ☐ Transform learning through leadership & staff support & development

☐ **Serving**

- ☒ Celebrate & promote our distinct Catholic identity
- ☒ Develop faith & live gospel values
- ☒ Strengthen connections between home, school, & parish
- ☒ Connect faith formation to learning

☐ **Belonging**

- ☐ Create safe, welcoming environments that reflect our diversity
- ☒ Promote a sense of mattering & dignity
- ☐ Foster equitable, inclusive, & barrier-free learning & work environments
- ☒ Engage families & build community partnerships

Background/Comments:

Catholic schools exist to support the evangelizing mission of the Church. Catholic parents send their children to Catholic schools with certain expectations. The overriding expectation is that their child will experience education permeated with religious values, religious instruction and be invited to participate in the sacramental life of the church. They also expect that Catholic values will be held, modeled, expressed and taught within the Catholic educational community. Our multi-year pastoral plan supports and animates the faith life of students and staff in the WCDSB.

Additionally, our Multi-Year Strategic Plan indicates that nurturing our Catholic community will be a priority area with opportunities to bear witness to our faith through joyful discipleship and our relationships with and in Christ as an essential strategic direction. To this end, we endeavor to provide opportunities to live out and inform our faith through implementation of our Pastoral Plan, which is informed by the Ontario Bishops' pastoral letter, *Renewing the Promise*.

Last year we transitioned to Listen to Understand, the first year of our new three-year Pastoral Plan. We were invited and challenged to **"listen with the ears of our hearts"**. (January 2022) This kind of listening with the heart invites us to not just think about things, but to feel with others. The goal of this listening is to understand – understand the point of view of another person, understand the experience of someone different than us, and begin to understand a world view different than our own.

True listening leaves room for the Holy Spirit to speak into the messiness of our lives and our relationships. During our 2025 **Spiritual Development Day**, we made plenty of room for the Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts as we launched our first year of our new Pastoral Theme, Listen to Understand.

In collaboration with the Diocese of Hamilton, **WCDSB continued its Parish-School Partnership** project, inspired by the vision articulated in ***Forward Together in Christ***. This past school year marked the second consecutive year of this initiative, reflecting our ongoing commitment to deepening relationships between our schools and parishes across the Waterloo Deanery

As part of this work, members of the Waterloo Deanery and school administrators gathered to share a meaningful experience of dialogue and discernment. In the second year of this initiative, Linda Staudt, former Director of Education for the London Catholic District School Board, continued to lead "Conversations in the Spirit," helping participants deepen the synodal listening practices that have become a cornerstone of our efforts to strengthen parish-school relationships.

WCDSB is proud to continue serving as a leader in this innovative approach, helping to shape and strengthen a model for parish-school collaboration. Building on the foundation established in the initiative's first year, participants further deepened relationships grounded in the theme of *Listening to Understand*, fostering a shared commitment to ongoing partnership in Catholic education.

This past Advent season, many WCDSB staff members participated in the virtual **CARFLEO Advent Retreat**, facilitated by **Linda Staudt**. The retreat provided a meaningful opportunity for prayer, reflection, and spiritual renewal during a busy time of year. Through guided reflection, faith sharing, and personal prayer, participants deepened their understanding of the Advent season and renewed

their commitment to faith leadership within their communities. Beyond the Advent season, the retreat helped cultivate a spirit of hope that participants carried back into their schools.

During our **Listen to Understand** pastoral year, educators from across the province gathered for the **When Faith Meets Pedagogy Conference**, a unique opportunity for prayer, learning, and professional dialogue. WCDSB was well represented by almost 25 staff from across the system, including members of our own team who facilitated workshop sessions, served on the organizing committee and shared their expertise with colleagues from other Catholic school boards.

Centered on the theme of **Stewards of Hope: Sharing Our Time, Talent and Treasure**, the conference invited participants to explore how hope can be lived and expressed within schools, parishes, and communities. Attendees were inspired by keynote presenter **Danielle Campo McLeod**, whose powerful story of perseverance and hope resonated deeply with those in attendance.

As part of our **Listen to Understand** pastoral year, WCDSB once again partnered with **Bridget Ker**, Coordinator of **The Saint John's Bible** and Archives Technician at the **Bishop Farrell Library & Archives** in the Diocese of Hamilton. During the Grade 8 retreat at **Mount Mary**, Bridget introduced students to the beauty and significance of *The Saint John's Bible*, using it as a powerful tool to explore our pastoral theme, "Speak, Lord, for Your Servant is Listening" (1 Samuel 3:10). Through guided reflection, and engagement with *The Saint John's Bible*, students explored how listening to God's Word can shape their understanding of themselves, while reflecting on the call to listen with open hearts as they prepared for the transition to secondary school.

Each year, the Waterloo Catholic District School Board hosts a Commissioning Ceremony to honour the gifts and leadership of newly appointed administrators and Catholic School Advisory Council (CSAC) Chairs. Held at St. Mary's Parish, the celebration featured a Liturgy of the Word led by the Board's Spiritual Animator, Deacon Richard Olson, who offered a blessing for the newly commissioned leaders as they began their ministry of service within our school communities. Director of Education Annalisa Varano welcomed attendees and expressed gratitude for their willingness to lead, setting a tone of encouragement, collaboration, and hope.

This year's **Theology on Tap** provided an opportunity for staff to gather for an evening of faith, conversation, and community centered on the theme of **Pilgrimage**. Led by **Fr. David Reitzel**, the session invited participants to reflect on the spiritual significance of pilgrimage as a journey of renewal. Through personal stories, practical insights, and rich discussion, our over 60 attendees were encouraged to consider how the Camino experience can deepen faith and open new pathways for encountering God in everyday life. The evening fostered meaningful dialogue and strengthened connections among participants while highlighting the value of creating informal spaces for faith exploration and accompaniment. During **Catholic Education Week**, schools across the Waterloo Catholic District School Board came together to celebrate the gift of Catholic education through prayer, learning, and community engagement. A highlight of the week was the Board-wide focus on the book **Drawing God** by Karen Kiefer, Director of the Church in the 21st Century Center at Boston College. More than 50 classes participated in a special workshop with Karen, where students were encouraged to reflect on and express how they feel when they think about God through art and creative storytelling, fostering meaningful conversations about their personal relationship with God.

On May 20, the WCDSB once again supported the **Annual Interfaith Community Breakfast**, a meaningful gathering that brings together faith leaders and community partners from across

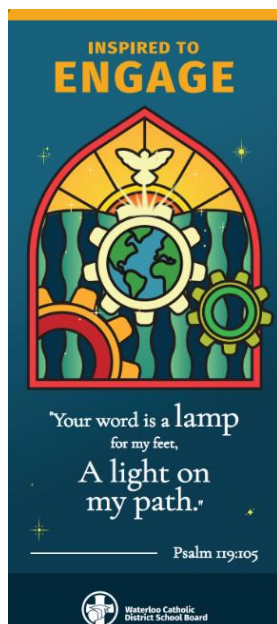
Waterloo Region. This event reflects the shared values of compassion, service, and community that unite us across traditions, and affirms WCDSB's place as a valued partner in the broader faith community of our region.

As a special tribute to Bishop Douglas Crosby on his retirement, every WCDSB school participated in the creation of an **Alphabet Gratitude Book**, celebrating his many years of faithful service to Catholic education. Each school was assigned a letter of the alphabet and invited students to create a page expressing gratitude through words and artwork that reflected Bishop Crosby's impact on their faith journey and school community. The completed book served as a collaborative and creative expression of thanks from students across the Board, recognizing Bishop Crosby's spiritual leadership, support of Catholic education, and lasting contribution to our schools and communities.

The Waterloo Catholic District School Board was honoured to participate in the **50th Anniversary Celebration of Mount Mary Religious Retreat Centre on May 31**, recognizing five decades of faithful service, spiritual leadership, and commitment to faith formation in the Waterloo Region. The celebration provided an opportunity to give thanks for the Sisters' enduring legacy and their contributions to Catholic education, parish life, and the broader faith community. Through shared prayer, fellowship, and reflection, the event highlighted the strong and longstanding relationship between Mount Mary and the WCDSB, while celebrating a retreat legacy that continues to inspire future generations, with all schools participating and providing Grade 8 students this important faith encounter!



INSPIRED TO ENGAGE



As we enter the second year of our three-year pastoral plan, we move from **Listen to Understand** to a deeper call to **Engagement**. Over the past year, we learned that honest listening opens the door to genuine understanding, allowing us to encounter one another with greater openness, empathy, and respect. When we create space to truly hear the experiences, perspectives, and hopes of others, we become more attentive to the presence and movement of the Holy Spirit within our communities. This kind of listening does not end in understanding alone; it invites a response, calling us to become active participants in building relationships, strengthening community, and advancing our shared mission.

This year, our focus on **Inspired to Engage** challenges us to move from reflection to participation, from understanding to accompaniment, and from dialogue to meaningful action. Inspired by Christ's call to "love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34), we look forward to fostering communities where every person is welcomed, valued, and invited to contribute to the flourishing of others.



The Diocesan Mass Celebrating the Blessing of Catholic Education, sponsored annually by the Catholic Education Partnership in the Diocese, was held on September 16 at St. Mary of the Seven Sorrows Parish in Kitchener. This year, the Waterloo Catholic District School Board hosted the event.

The evening began with an inspiring keynote address by Julianne Stanz, one of the most respected voices in Catholic education and evangelization. Drawing on *Pope Leo XIV's Apostolic Letter, Drawing New Maps of Hope*, Julianne reflected on the image of “educational constellations,” challenging educators to build faith-filled learning communities where relationships, not technology, remain at the heart of student growth.

Following the keynote, Bishop Dabrowski, attending his first Diocesan Celebration of Catholic Education, celebrated a Mass of Thanksgiving at St. Mary's Church. The evening concluded with a fellowship reception at the Waterloo Catholic Education Centre.

This annual gathering celebrates the gift of publicly funded Catholic education and brings together students, educators, clergy, trustees, and community partners from across the seven Catholic school boards of the Diocese. Blessed with an exceptional turnout, the event was a joyful expression of our shared commitment to Catholic education.



As part of our ongoing faith formation journey, staff will gather in their school communities on **October 26** for this year's **Spiritual Development Day**. The morning will be centered on a reflective **Pilgrim's Journal**, inviting participants to engage individually and collectively in meaningful conversation and reflection. Guiding this experience will be a series of inspiring video reflections prepared by **Julianne Stanz specifically for WCDSB staff**, whose insights will help bring the journal to life and encourage deeper exploration of our pastoral theme.

Through personal reflection, shared dialogue, and prayerful engagement, staff will be invited to embrace the spirit of pilgrimage, recognizing that faith is both a personal journey and a communal experience. Staff will be encouraged to embrace the call to **Engage**, bringing renewed purpose and energy to their work and relationships within our Catholic learning communities.

The **afternoon** portion of WCDSB's **Spiritual Development Day** will shift the focus from reflection to action through an **Amazing Faith Race**, an engaging and high-energy experience designed to deepen staff awareness of **Catholic life, including liturgy, prayer, saints and this year's pastoral theme**. Through a series of interactive challenges and collaborative activities, participants will explore key dimensions of our Catholic identity in a dynamic and enjoyable way, fostering both learning and community. Balancing the quieter, reflective nature of the morning, the **Amazing Faith Race** will invite staff to actively engage with the faith-filled mission of Catholic education while building enthusiasm, connection, and a shared sense of purpose.

Last year, we sponsored two staff members to complete their Certificate in Catholic Education through St. Jerome's University. As part of their studies, they developed a Capstone Project that resulted in the creation of a Pilgrim's Backpack, a faith-filled resource that will help animate this year's pastoral theme while preparing students for the journey ahead as our theme continues to unfold.

The **Pilgrim's Backpack** represents a travelling pastoral symbol of these two scriptural passages (Matthew 25:35-36 and Luke 10:25-37). It contains items to bring these gospel passages to life and activities to teach, motivate, and engage students in the courage to serve. The Pilgrim's Backpack will travel from classroom to classroom through each Family of Schools in our system (primary division). It is our hope each classroom prays with the backpack, reflects the Scriptures through a lesson plan, and commits to an act of service.

Four Pivotal School Liturgies of the Word will be provided to schools throughout the year, including an Opening Liturgy, Advent Liturgy, Lenten Liturgy, and End-of-Year Commissioning Liturgy. Each liturgy will invite students and staff into a challenge or action that encourages engagement with sources of wisdom and the themes of our pastoral journey.

To support this work, principals will receive Canva slides featuring interconnected **cogs and gears, symbolizing our collective efforts to bring the pastoral theme to life**. Schools will be encouraged to add photos throughout the year **showcasing student and staff participation** in theme-related activities. Working in collaboration with our communications department, we will highlight and celebrate these engagement moments across the system, sharing stories of faith, learning, and service. These slides can be continually updated and shared during Catholic Education Week and again at the end of the school year as a celebration of the many ways students and staff have lived out the pastoral theme.

Building on the success of the gatherings the past two years, WCDSB and our Waterloo Catholic Deanery partners will once again host **Conversations in the Spirit** sessions in October and May of this school year. These opportunities will continue to bring together school and parish leaders for prayer, listening, and fellowship, strengthening the relationships that are at the heart of Catholic Education. As our collaboration continues to grow, these conversations will help foster new partnerships and coordinated efforts across an increasing number of initiatives, supporting our shared mission of the spiritual wellbeing of our students, families, schools, and parish communities.

Led by WCDSB Spiritual Animator **Paula Rush**, this year we will be offering offering staff a Bible Study and an opportunity to journey through the Gospel of Mark, exploring one of the earliest and most compelling accounts of Jesus' ministry. Participants will engage with Mark's fast-paced narrative and its enduring questions about who Jesus is and what it means to follow his call today. Grounded in the theme *"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path,"* the study invites participants to encounter Scripture as a source of wisdom, insight, and direction for the journey ahead.

Throughout the Year of St. Francis of Assisi, marking the 800th anniversary of his death, WCDSB schools will have opportunities to celebrate the saint's enduring witness of peace, humility, care for creation, and service to others. Drawing on resources from the Diocese of Hamilton, students and staff will be invited to engage in prayer, acts of service, environmental stewardship initiatives, and faith-filled reflections inspired by St. Francis' call to be instruments of God's peace in the world.

Schools will also have access to staff faith formation opportunities, including Lunch and Learn sessions that explore the life, spirituality, and lasting relevance of St. Francis for Catholic educators today.

WCDSB is exploring a partnership with **Resurrection College** to offer a series of Twilight Retreats. These sessions would provide staff with an opportunity for quiet prayer, focused learning on a topic of faith and space for growth and inspiration outside the regular school day. Offerings will include sessions led by experienced speakers and faith leaders, including **Paul Tratnyek**, whose work in **Christian meditation and contemplative** prayer would offer participants an introduction to different approaches to prayer and reflection within the Catholic tradition. Together, these Twilight Retreats would support staff in deepening their understanding of faith while fostering a culture of ongoing spiritual formation across the system.

Building on the success of last year's Catholic Education Week partnership, NTIP and Faith Formation plan to once again welcome author **Karen Kiefer** to the WCDSB, this time featuring her newest book, **Growing God**. Last year Karen presented over 60 classes as part of this initiative. Through virtual presentations and engaging conversations, Karen will invite students and educators to reflect on themes of wonder, growth, and the many ways we come to recognize God's presence in our lives. As with **Drawing God**, schools will be encouraged to explore the book in classrooms and Learning Commons spaces, with opportunities for staff and students to connect directly with the author through interactive sessions planned for the spring.



Theology on Tap is anticipated to return this March as we hope to secure special guest speaker, **Fr. Eric Mah**, host of the popular **Catholic Latte** podcast. Through his engaging and down-to-earth approach, Fr. Eric invites audiences to reflect on faith, everyday life, and the search for meaning in today's world. This evening gathering will provide staff with an opportunity for conversation, community, and faith-filled dialogue in a welcoming and informal setting and once again Inspiring us for mission!

Catholic Education Week 2027 will invite our school communities to embrace the theme, **Becoming Artisans of Peace**, inspired by the scripture passage, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Throughout the week, students, staff, families, parish partners, and clergy will come together to celebrate the unique gift of Catholic education while exploring how each of us is called to cultivate peace through our words, actions, relationships, and witness to the Gospel. This year, as in past years, our schools will highlight the many ways Catholic education forms young people as builders of peace in our world. The theme will shape liturgies, reflection, and formation during Catholic Education Week and throughout the school year.

Some other Highlights of our **Inspired to Engage** Theme will include the following:

Working closely with Lema, Darcy and our communications team to capture student voices as we **Listen to the word of God** and learn more about the Feasts associated with our Catholic schools.

We are thrilled to have another strong group of candidates participating in **the Information to Transformation program**. This year's cohort recently gathered for their first module at St. Jerome's University, bringing together teachers, support staff, and administrators from across the system. Through faith formation, reflection, and leadership development, participants will deepen their personal and communal faith while bringing their learning back to their schools and departments, helping to nurture and strengthen Catholic learning communities throughout the Board.

This year's retreat theme is "*Inspired to Engage*." In chapel, students engage in youth-friendly Lectio Divina, with quiet reflection between readings.

Each day begins with a student-selected theme song, chosen during a pre-retreat lyric reflection. The song is played daily to open chapel time. Students also listen to Taizé music and close with the ***Inspired to Engage*** prayer by Paula Rush.

This year, we are excited to continue our partnership with **Development and Peace, Caritas Canada** and their education team to deepen our understanding of **Catholic Social Teaching** across all school communities. Through age-appropriate training and classroom resources, staff will be supported in helping students connect their faith to real-world issues.

A key focus will be **care for our common home**, especially as last year marked the **10th anniversary of *Laudato Si'***, Pope Francis' landmark encyclical on the environment. Rooted in the principles of ecological justice, this theme invites students to become stewards of creation, linking sustainability, and solidarity to the heart of our Gospel mission. This collaboration supports our ongoing goal of forming students who are globally aware, and increasing the number of WCDSB communities considered to be Development and Peace Schools.

Recommendation:

This report is for the information of the Board.

Prepared/Reviewed By:

Annalisa Varano
Chief Executive Officer

Paul Mendonca
Superintendent of Learning

John Murphy
Religion and Family Life Consultant

*4.2 DIRECTOR Monitoring Reports: Where the Board receives from the CEO a monitoring report that flows from a responsibility delegated to the Director under Board Policy – except where approval is required by the Board on a matter delegated by policy to the Board – the minutes of the Meeting at which the Report is received shall expressly provide that the Board has received and approved of the Report as an action consistent with the authority delegated to the CEO, subject in all instances to what otherwise actually occurred.



Date: October 5, 2026
To: Board of Trustees
From: Chief Executive Officer
Subject: Student Achievement Plan (SAP) Update

Type of Report:

- ☐ Decision-Making
- ☐ Monitoring
- ☒ Incidental Information concerning day-to-day operations

Type of Information:

- ☐ Information for Board of Trustees Decision-Making
- ☐ Monitoring Information of Board Policy XX XXX
- ☒ Information only of day-to-day operational matters delegated to the CEO

Origin: (cite Education Act and/or Board Policy or other legislation)

Education Act Section 169. (1)

Every Board shall:(a) promote student achievement and well-being; (b) ensure effective stewardship of the board's resources; (c) deliver effective and appropriate education programs to its pupils; f) develop a multi-year plan aimed at achieving the goals of student achievement and well-being, positive school climate, inclusive and accepting schools, stewardship of resources, and effective and appropriate education programs to its pupils

Policy Statement and/or Education Act/other Legislation citation:

Bill 98, Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023
PPM 159 Collaborative Professionalism (2016) School Effectiveness Framework (2013)
PPM 119 Equity & Inclusion (2013)

Alignment to the MYSP:

☒ **Learning**

- ☒ Support multiple pathways & tools for success
- ☒ Accelerate excellence & innovation while building transferable, future-ready skills
- ☒ Engage students as co-creators in their learning
- ☒ Transform learning through leadership & staff support & development

☒ **Serving**

- ☒ Celebrate & promote our distinct Catholic identity
- ☒ Develop faith & live gospel values
- ☒ Strengthen connections between home, school, & parish
- ☒ Connect faith formation to learning

☒ Belonging

- ☒ Create safe, welcoming environments that reflect our diversity
- ☒ Promote a sense of mattering & dignity
- ☒ Foster equitable, inclusive, & barrier-free learning & work environments
- ☒ Engage families & build community partnerships

Background/Comments:

On July 28, 2023, the Ministry of Education released a memorandum communicating key regulatory and policy reforms in support of the [Better Schools and Student Outcomes Act, 2023](#), including a new regulation that established provincial priorities for student achievement:

- **Achievement of Learning Outcomes in Core Academic Skills:** This involves focusing on improving student performance in core subjects like reading, writing, and math.
- **Preparation of Students for Future Success:** This aims to equip students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in post-secondary education, the workforce, and beyond.
- **Student Engagement and Well-being:** This focuses on creating a positive and supportive learning environment that promotes student engagement and well-being.

As part of the memorandum, the ministry released a Student Achievement Plan (SAP) framework, which is aligned with the above student achievement priorities. The framework sets out goals and performance indicators for school boards to measure student achievement, develop action plans and monitor their progress on levelling up student outcomes. The ministry releases pre-populated materials to support the development and public reporting of board data and action plans related to the Student Achievement Plan through a secure ministry SharePoint site. The Public Reporting Template is fillable, pre-populated and provides a consistent approach for communicating boards' data, action plans and progress on indicators to their communities.

In the interest of transparency and accountability to local communities and in alignment with the Education Act (Subsection 169.1(4)), school boards are required to publish on multi-year plans on their webpages in a form requested by the Minister each school year. To support school boards in meeting this requirement, school boards must use the Student Achievement Plan Public Reporting Template to publicly report on progress made in relation to the provincial student achievement priorities.

We are required to post our completed template to our public website by April 30th and expected to notify the ministry once our Student Achievement Plan is publicly posted. To access the WCDSB Student Achievement Plan documents, please visit our website which will be updated annually on April 30: <https://www.wcdsb.ca/about-us/student-achievement-plan-sap/>

The Public Reporting Template has two sections:

1. A summary report of Student Achievement Performance 11 Indicators – the first page of the template provides results for our board as well as the provincial results for each performance indicator. The purpose of this summary is to provide parents, guardians, students and local

communities with a snapshot of how a school board is performing as compared to the province, across indicators under key provincial priorities.

2. A table where additional local data and action plan information can be included for each provincial priority – the second page of the template includes fillable sections for school boards to share additional local data for individual performance indicators, such as analyzed data by sub-populations of students (see [Ontario's Anti-Racism Data Standards](#), Standard 29), as well as information from our action plans for each of the goals. Under each provincial priority and goal, we have an open text box to fill out:

- **"Additional School Board Measures"** – includes further breakdowns of indicators by student sub-groups from local data, and related indicators aligned with goals (e.g., Math
- Achievement Action Plan to reflect community needs.
- **"How Our School Board Performs"** – shows the reported value (e.g., percentage or disproportionality index) for indicators from "Additional School Board Measures," based on student sub-groups.
- **"Action Our School Board Will Take to Improve"** – outlines planned actions, policies, or strategies over the next three years to enhance student outcomes and address trends and community feedback.

In accordance with the responsibilities outlined in section 230.1 of the Education Act, the Ministry of Education has identified the following four objectives to guide district school boards in the development and implementation of their Student Achievement Plans:

1. **Provide a consistent set of performance indicators:** This ensures that all school boards across Ontario are using the same measures to track student achievement.
2. **Ensure strategic planning and policy development are data-driven:** This means that decisions about education are based on evidence and data about student outcomes.
3. **Facilitate involvement of families and communities:** This recognizes the importance of partnerships between schools, families, and communities in supporting student success.
4. **Promote transparency from school boards:** This ensures that the public is informed about how school boards are performing and what actions they are taking to improve student outcomes.

Monitoring Student Achievement Plan with internal indicators at WCDSB:

During the 2025–2026 school year, the Research Team continued its commitment to supporting system-wide improvement through accessible analysis and reporting, primarily delivered via monitoring reports in Power BI. A key focus has been replicating each Student Achievement Plan (SAP) indicator calculated by the Ministry of Education (MOE) to produce comparable internal WCDSB metrics. While some Ministry indicators—such as graduation rates—cannot be fully replicated due to the Ministry's access to provincial-level data and its ability to track students across boards, our internal models are closely aligned with the MOE's methodology. This work supports efforts to (1) reduce the lag between the release of Ministry data and its local use, and (2) ensure both Board- and School-level indicators are available to guide the planning and monitoring of improvement initiatives across the system.

School SAP template and reporting template:

To support the development of a more effective and user-friendly School Student Achievement Plan (SAP) template, the dedicated committee comprising elementary and secondary administrators, members of the research team, and the Program Services Superintendent continue to strive for improvements. Our collective goal is to design a tool that is both efficient and intuitive allowing for meaningful customization to reflect the unique priorities, planning strategies, and monitoring needs of individual schools. Our template balances simplicity with flexibility, empowering school teams to engage in strategic planning with greater clarity and confidence. We were pleased to receive positive feedback from our administrators after having 1 year of School SAP completion and use. School-specific SAPs are accessible through the Power BI platform, ensuring seamless integration with existing data systems and ongoing support for school improvement efforts.

Exciting Highlights of the School SAP Templates:

1. ***September 2026 updates were made to reflect the feedback from Administrators School SAP Survey- minor changes to reflect ease of use by the administrators.**
2. **Easy to Use Dashboard – No Data Hunting**
The new School SAP dashboard eliminates the need for manual data collection and consolidation. All relevant information is now centralized, allowing staff to access key metrics and planning tools without navigating multiple sources or spreadsheets. This streamlined approach not only saves time but also reduces the risk of data inconsistencies, ensuring that school teams can focus more on strategic planning and less on administrative tasks.
3. **Pre-Populated SAP for Schools**
Each dashboard comes pre-populated with school-specific data, tailored to reflect their unique context and priorities. This customization ensures that staff begin with a solid foundation, enabling quicker analysis and more informed decision-making. By embedding relevant data directly into the dashboard, the tool supports a more efficient workflow and aligns seamlessly with school improvement planning processes.
4. **One Page, Zero Tabs, Colour-Coordinated to Match Ministry of Education and WCDSB Priorities**
The redesigned dashboard features a clean, single-page layout with no additional tabs, making navigation intuitive and user-friendly. Strategic use of colour-coding reflects the Ministry of Education and WCDSB priorities, helping users visually connect their school goals with broader system objectives. The dashboard incorporates dynamic drop-down menus that guide administrators through data selection and input. Whether reviewing progress or updating plans, the drop-down functionality ensures a smooth and efficient process.

Recommendation:

This report is for the information of the Board.

Prepared/Reviewed By:

Annalisa Varano
Chief Executive Officer

Jennifer Ritsma
Superintendent of Learning

Ryan Lewis
Data Architect

Kelly Roberts
Research Coordinator

*4.2 DIRECTOR Monitoring Reports: Where the Board receives from the CEO a monitoring report that flows from a responsibility delegated to the Director under Board Policy - except where approval is required by the Board on a matter delegated by policy to the Board - the minutes of the Meeting at which the Report is received shall expressly provide that the Board has received and approved of the Report as an action consistent with the authority delegated to the CEO, subject in all instances to what otherwise actually occurred.



Date: October 5, 2026
To: Board of Trustees
From: Chief Executive Officer
Subject: Equity Action Plan Yearly Update

Type of Report:

- ☐ Decision-Making
- ☐ Monitoring
- ☒ Incidental Information concerning day-to-day operations

Type of Information:

- ☐ Information for Board of Trustees Decision-Making
- ☐ Monitoring Information of Board Policy **XX XXX**
- ☒ Information only of day-to-day operational matters delegated to the CEO

Origin: (cite Education Act and/or Board Policy or other legislation)

Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (Ministry of Education, 2009, 2013)

Policy Statement and/or Education Act/other Legislation citation:

Ontario Equity Action Plan (2017)

Ontario Human Rights Code (1990, amended 2019, amended 2024)

Still In Every Class In Every School: Second National Climate Survey on Homophobia, Biphobia, and Transphobia in Canadian Schools (Egale, 2022)

Dreams Delayed: Addressing Systemic Anti-Black Racism and Discrimination in Ontario's Public Education System (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2025)

Alignment to the MYSP:

☒ **Learning**

- ☒ Support multiple pathways & tools for success
- ☒ Accelerate excellence & innovation while building transferable, future-ready skills
- ☒ Engage students as co-creators in their learning
- ☒ Transform learning through leadership & staff support & development

☒ **Serving**

- ☐ Celebrate & promote our distinct Catholic identity
- ☐ Develop faith & live gospel values
- ☒ Strengthen connections between home, school, & parish
- ☐ Connect faith formation to learning

☒ Belonging

- ☒ Create safe, welcoming environments that reflect our diversity
- ☒ Promote a sense of mattering & dignity
- ☒ Foster equitable, inclusive, & barrier-free learning & work environments
- ☒ Engage families & build community partnerships

Background/Comments:

Executive Summary

The 2025-2026 school year marked the first year of implementation of the [2025-2030 Equity Action Plan](#), grounded in Catholic Social Teaching, the Beloved Community Engagement Framework, and Two-Eyed Seeing. Equity Services worked collaboratively with students, families, staff, administrators, and community partners to strengthen belonging, address barriers, respond to human rights concerns, and promote equitable outcomes across the system.

Equity Services Priorities	Key Areas of Support
• Equity Action Plan implementation • Human rights and equity case support • Student leadership and engagement • Professional learning and capacity building • Community and post-secondary partnerships • Equity-focused resource and policy development • System-level equity and inclusion initiatives	• Human rights response and advocacy • Student, family, and staff support • Professional learning • Policy implementation • Community engagement • System leadership and continuous improvement

Equity Services	System Leadership Support
• Graduation Coach for Black Students (auxiliary) • Indigenous Education & Equity Consultant (auxiliary) • Equity Specialist • Equity System Navigator • Senior Manager of Equity (Human Rights and Equity Lead)	• Principals, managers, and system leaders • Superintendents of Learning (Equity and Indigenous Education) • CEO/Director of Education

Equity Action Plan Pillars

Pillar I: Listen (Elevating Student, Family, Staff, and Community Voices)

Listening is the foundation of equity work. Consistent with the Beloved Community Engagement Framework, Equity Services created intentional opportunities for students, families, caregivers, staff members, and community partners to share their experiences, identify barriers, and help shape system improvement. Examples of how Equity Services, in collaboration with schools, students, families, and community partners, amplified diverse voices and created opportunities for meaningful engagement,

dialogue, and leadership include: engaging student and family case work, supporting our advisory council, and organizing employee affinity groups.

Pillar II: Engage (Building Relationships and Shared Responsibility)

The Equity Action Plan views engagement as an ongoing process of building relationships, fostering trust, and working collaboratively toward common goals. Throughout the year, Equity Services engaged students, families, educators, community agencies, colleges, universities, and faith partners in meaningful partnerships that strengthened understanding, encouraged shared learning, and supported collective action. These relationships helped create opportunities for connection, participation, and collaboration, reinforcing the shared responsibility of advancing equity, belonging, and student success throughout the Board. The following examples highlight how Equity Services and its partners fostered authentic engagement of students, families, staff, and community members throughout the year: facilitated equity-focused student groups, led monthly staff training through Tuesday Talk and Treats, and nurtured community and post-secondary partnerships and opportunities.

Pillar III: Serve (Supporting Students, Families, and School Communities)

Equity Services and collaborators support and collaborate with students, staff, administrators, families, and community partners across the Waterloo Catholic District School Board in fostering inclusive, equitable, and welcoming learning environments. Through student engagement, professional learning, community partnerships, and system-wide initiatives, we work to remove barriers, strengthen belonging, and ensure every member of our community feels valued, respected, and empowered to succeed. Guided by the values of Catholic education, we are committed to advancing dignity, justice, and opportunity for all. The examples below provide a snapshot of how Equity Services and its partners worked together to serve the diverse needs of our communities while fostering equitable, inclusive, and welcoming spaces where every individual can succeed: supported the graduation program for Black students, created resources to support internationally-trained educators, and developed human rights and equity modules for the system.

Pillar IV: Reflect (Building Equity Capacity Through Learning and Professional Growth)

Equity Services' role extends beyond implementing initiatives; it involves creating the conditions for deep organizational reflection. Through student voice, data inquiry, community engagement, professional dialogue, and equity-centered learning processes, the department in collaboration with the research team and senior leaders, supports schools and system leaders in examining the experiences and outcomes of students. This reflective work challenges assumptions, uncovers systemic barriers, highlights promising practices, and fosters a culture of continuous improvement. By encouraging critical reflection and collective accountability, the department helps ensure that every student experiences belonging, well-being, engagement, and success. Some of the activities Equity Services and collaborators do to support deep organizational reflection include: self-reflection through case studies, facilitated school equity and representation walks, and built on the research team's discussions on disproportionality at WCDSB.

Pillar V: Transform (Creating Sustainable System Change)

As part of the ongoing review of the Board's Equity and Inclusion Action Plan, Equity Services led the revision of the APC037 Equity and Inclusive Education AP document to strengthen the Board's

commitment to equity, human rights, anti-racism, and anti-oppression. The updated Administrative Procedure reaffirms the Board's commitment to creating learning and working environments where every student, staff member, and family is treated with dignity, experiences a sense of belonging, and has equitable access to opportunities for success. It strengthens expectations for identifying and removing systemic barriers, responding to discrimination and harassment, and promoting inclusive practices across all aspects of school and Board operations. Grounded in Catholic Social Teaching, the Ontario Human Rights Code, and Ministry of Education policy, the revised document places greater emphasis on anti-oppressive practices, equitable leadership, culturally responsive education, professional learning, data-informed decision-making, accountability, and community engagement. The update also affirms the Board's commitment to creating safe, welcoming, and inclusive schools that actively support the success and well-being of all members of the Catholic learning community.

Looking Forward

As we enter the second year of the Equity Action Plan, Equity Services remains committed to advancing the vision of the Beloved Community by:

- Deepening student and family engagement
- Strengthening implementation of Equity Action Plan commitments
- Expanding professional learning opportunities
- Increasing support for historically marginalized students and families
- Continuing to build equitable, inclusive, and faith-centered learning environments where every learner experiences dignity, belonging, and success

Together, through listening, engagement, service, reflection, and transformation, we continue our shared journey toward a Waterloo Catholic District School Board where human rights and equity is not simply an initiative, but a way of life.

Recommendation:

This report is for the information of the Board.

Prepared/Reviewed By: Annalisa Varano
Chief Executive Officer

Lynn Garrioch
Senior Manager of Equity

Jordan Figueiredo
Superintendent of Learning

***4.2 DIRECTOR Monitoring Reports:** Where the Board receives from the CEO a monitoring report that flows from a responsibility delegated to the Director under Board Policy – except where approval is required by the Board on a matter delegated by policy to the Board – the minutes of the Meeting at which the Report is received shall expressly provide that the Board has received and approved of the Report as an action consistent with the authority delegated to the CEO, subject in all instances to what otherwise actually occurred.



Date: October 5, 2026
To: Board of Trustees
From: Chief Executive Officer
Subject: Wellbeing; Mental Health

Type of Report:

- ☐ Decision-Making
- ☐ Monitoring
- ☒ Incidental Information concerning day-to-day operations

Type of Information:

- ☐ Information for Board of Trustees Decision-Making
- ☐ Monitoring Information of Board Policy **XX XXX**
- ☒ Information only of day-to-day operational matters delegated to the CEO

Origin: (cite Education Act and/or Board Policy or other legislation)

Regulation 306 Special Education Programs and Services

Policy Statement and/or Education Act/other Legislation citation:

Policy 1001 - Ends

Alignment to the MYSP:

☒ **Learning**

- ☒ Support multiple pathways & tools for success
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- ☒ Engage families & build community partnerships

Background/Comments:

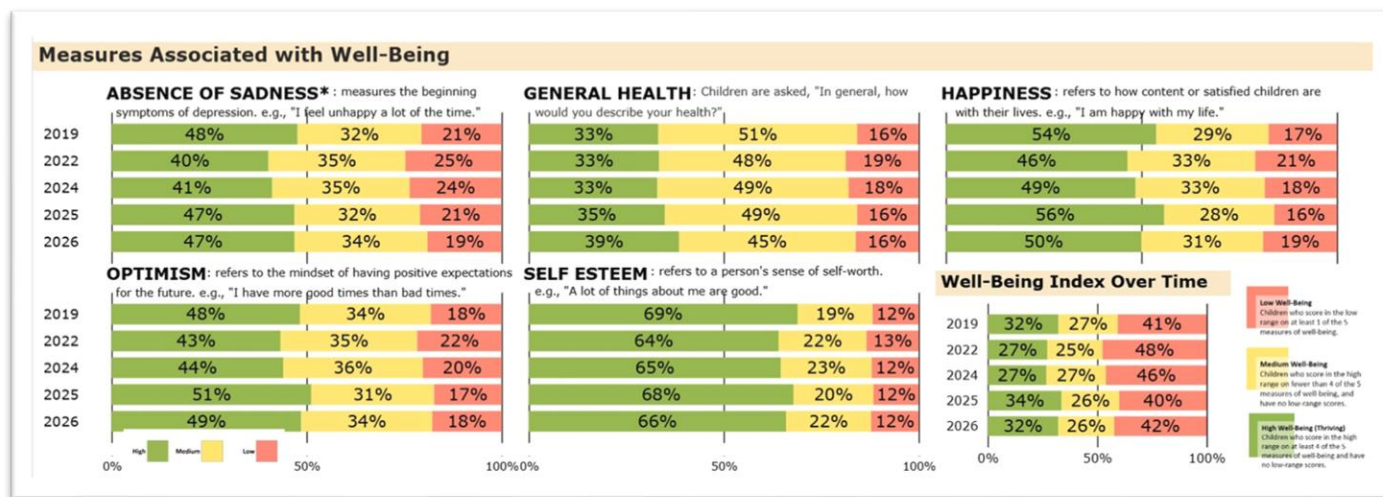
At the Waterloo Catholic District School Board, mentally healthy learning environments are foundational to student achievement, wellbeing, and belonging. Grounded in Catholic Social Teaching and the principles of human dignity and solidarity, the Board's approach advances the Multi-Year Strategic Plan pillars of Learning, Serving, and Belonging through identity-affirming, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed mental health promotion, prevention, and pathways to care. It is aligned with School Mental Health Ontario, Policy/Program Memorandum 169, and a multi-tiered system of support that provides universal mental health promotion and targeted or intensive services according to student need.

MDI Update

Over recent years, the mental health needs of students have grown increasingly complex. Data from the *Middle Years Development Instrument (MDI) Wellbeing Index* highlight this trend: in 2019, 40.7% of students reported low wellbeing, rising to 47.6% by 2022. In response, the previous Goal for MYSIP Indicator #1 was established – to decrease the proportion of students categorized as experiencing “Low Wellbeing” from 45% in 2022 to 41%.

The 2026 MDI results indicate that 42% of students are experiencing low wellbeing compared with 46% in 2024 and 48% in 2022. While this represents a slight increase from 40% in 2025, the proportion of students reporting low wellbeing remains below pre-pandemic levels and substantially below the post-pandemic peak. Notably, 58% of students now report wellbeing in the medium (26%) or high (32%) range, indicating that the majority of students are meeting the wellbeing standard.

As we implement our new Multi-Year Strategic Plan, MDI findings will continue to inform efforts to strengthen wellbeing, belonging and positive mental health outcomes. While the overall trend is encouraging, the proportion of students reporting low wellbeing underscores the importance of continued investment in mental health promotion, social-emotional learning and are responsive supports for students.



WCDSB Mental Health and Addictions Strategy (2025-2028)

The 2025–2028 Mental Health and Addictions Strategy reflects input from students, families, staff, and community partners, together with research and provincial direction. The strategy is organized around five priorities: Students; Parents and Caregivers; Educators and School Staff; System Leaders and Administrators;

and Community and Partnerships. This report provides a high-level summary of progress during the first year of implementation and identifies areas of focus for 2026–2027.

Priority #1: STUDENTS: Student leadership, mental health and wellbeing literacy and access to mental health supports

MYSP Connection: Supports **Belonging** by strengthening student wellbeing and conditions that support dignity and mattering and supports **Learning** by building mental health literacy and skills that promote engagement and success.

Goal 1: Facilitate opportunities to ensure that student voice, perspective, and experience contribute to shaping the mental health and addiction strategies and activities in schools.

In 2025–2026, approximately 75 secondary students took part in Safe Schools Ambassador (SSA) gatherings, and 22 elementary schools joined the first full year of the Safe and Caring Schools Ambassador (SACSA) program. Drawing on #HearNowON, MDI data, and student feedback, participants led activities promoting awareness, connection, and belonging. Students highlighted the value of trusting relationships and inclusive spaces, and identified academic and social pressures, stigma, and fear of judgment as barriers to wellbeing and help-seeking. In 2026–2027, the Board will build on these structures, deepen students' use of school-level MDI data, and strengthen feedback mechanisms.

Goal 2: Support the integration of identity affirming, culturally responsive, social-emotional learning and mental health and addiction literacy into classroom instruction by providing resources, coaching, and professional learning opportunities.

The Kindergarten to Grade 3 Wayfinder project provided books, Mood Meter posters, and aligned resources board-wide, establishing a consistent foundation in the early years. Students also engaged in School Mental Health Ontario modules in Grades 6, 7, 8, and 10, and Grade 7 students took part in Sources of Strength presentations, building shared language, coping skills, and help-seeking confidence. In 2026–2027, Wayfinder will expand into Grades 4 to 8, alongside clearer resource pathways for educators and a continued focus on relationship-based approaches.

Goal 3: Ensure that students with mental health and addiction needs impacting them at school have access to a multi-tiered system of support including pathways of care to community-based services.

In the first year of implementation, the Mental Health team focused on ensuring that students experiencing mental health and addiction needs at school are identified early and connected to appropriate care. This work prioritized clarity, consistency, and awareness of pathways within both school-based and community services.

Strengthening early identification and awareness of supports

Suicide Prevention and Life Promotion training was delivered through staff meetings at 22 schools, strengthening staff capacity to recognize student needs and respond appropriately. The Student Mental Health and Wellbeing D2L course was accessed more than 11,000 times during the school year, while posters, social media, school communication, and updated guidance for administrators and guidance staff increased the visibility of available supports and clarified referral pathways and the roles of school-based mental health professionals.

Strengthening Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports

When students require targeted or intensive support, school teams refer to school social workers who provide evidence-informed, identity-affirming assessment, brief intervention, and navigation to, through and from community-based services. Between September 2025 and June 30th 2026, 1112 students received a school social work service. In the elementary panel, 570 students accessed support, while 542 were served in secondary. A

total of 548 students were referred to community-based mental health services. A suicide risk assessment was completed for 148 students, and 58 required a hospital referral.

A 7-week psychoeducational DBT skills-based group focused on the following skills: mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotion regulation and interpersonal effectiveness, expanded to 3 sites from the previous school year. It was delivered at St. Don Bosco Kitchener and Cambridge, Resurrection and St. Benedict.

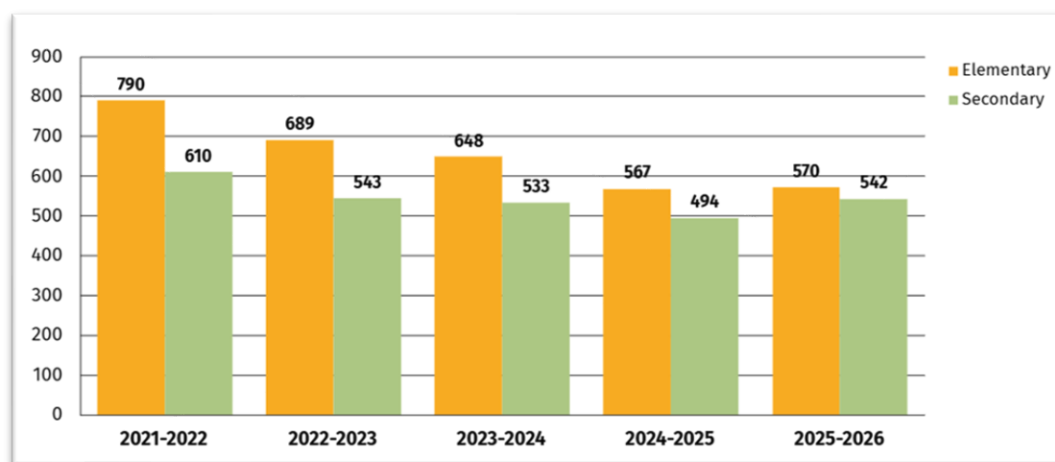
Between July and August 2026, 53 students were in receipt of a service provided by 6 school social workers.

Measurement Based Care (MBC):

A small group of school social workers piloted a Board approved program that will support measurement-based care (MBC). This is expected to grow during 2026/2027 in alignment with the expectations of PPM 169.

Data:

As outlined in the chart below, we now have five-years of comparative data for school social work services. Number of social work referrals over time:



Top five reason for referral (chosen by Administrator or Guidance) by Panel 2025/2026:

ELEMENTARY	SECONDARY
Anxiety, Panic, Worry (15%)	Attendance (22%)
Aggression, Physical fighting, Oppositional Behaviour (13%)	Anxiety, Panic, Worry (20%)
Attendance (13%)	Depression or Low Mood (14%)
Trauma Related Stress and Maladjustment (9%)	Family Conflict (12%)
Learning Difficulties and Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviour tied (8%)	Trauma Related Stress and Maladjustment (6%)

Looking ahead to 2026–2027

In the second year of implementation, the focus will be on strengthening consistency and coordination across the multi-tiered system of support. Further embedding measurement-based care into the school social work service delivery model for students in receipt of a brief service is intended to support student goal attainment, strengthen their engagement and improve mental health and wellbeing. Together, these efforts will contribute to a more coordinated and effective system of care for students

Priority #2: PARENTS & CAREGIVERS: Parent and caregiver voice, mental health literacy and knowledge of pathways to care

MYSP Connection: Supports **Belonging** by strengthening home-school relationships and family engagement, and supports **Serving** by improving access to information, resources, and clear pathways to care.

Goal 1: Provide Parents and caregivers with learning opportunities to strengthen mental health and addiction literacy and deepen understanding of the school-based multi-tiered system of supports and pathways to community-based care.

In 2025–2026, the Board expanded caregiver access to practical mental health information through presentations, curated resources, short trauma-informed videos, and engagement with CPIC and SEAC. School Mental Health Ontario's By Your Side webinar series was promoted, addressing topics such as anxiety, substance use, vaping, gaming, and device use, and Grade 8 transition events provided families with resources on recognizing mental health concerns and digital wellbeing. The Board's mental health Instagram account generated more than 44,000 views across 149 posts. In 2026–2027, the focus will be on offering caregiver learning in multiple formats and languages, using MDI findings to guide targeted outreach, and improving the Mental Health and Wellbeing website so families can more easily navigate supports and pathways to care.

Goal 2: Engage and amplify parent and caregiver voice, perspective and experience in the development and implementation of mental health and addiction strategies

Progress on this goal was more limited in the first year. Feedback from CPIC, SEAC, and survey data informed the 2026–2027 annual plan and social media content, and early work explored exit surveys and digital engagement, though consistent system-wide feedback loops were not yet established. In 2026–2027, the Board will build more regular feedback mechanisms through committee updates, exit surveys, and brief digital pulse checks, using key themes to refine planning and communication.

Priority #3: EDUCATORS & SCHOOL STAFF: Trauma-informed schools and identity-affirming social emotional learning

MYSP Connection: Supports **Learning** by strengthening staff capacity through professional learning that informs practice, and supports **Belonging** by fostering safe, inclusive, trauma-informed and identity-affirming learning environments.

Goal 1: Promote and strengthen tier 1 trauma-informed school and classroom practices, by equipping educators and staff with practical tools, resources, and professional learning that also contribute to staff wellbeing

The Start Here Tier 1 Mental Health Toolkit gave staff a structured entry point to the Board's mental health pillars, trauma-informed practices, and the Regulate, Relate, Reason framework, reaching more than 460 unique users and approximately 1,400 views. Implementation was reinforced through the Mental Health and Wellbeing Champion network, targeted learning for Child and Youth Care Workers, and the distribution of 1,500 Regulate, Relate, Reason lanyards. Over 90% of the 62 New Teacher Induction Program participants reported greater awareness and confidence using classroom mental health strategies, and among Champion survey respondents, 100% reported increased awareness of classroom resources and 87.5% felt better equipped to implement daily strategies. Staff also identified time and workload as barriers, reinforcing the need for low-lift, high-impact approaches. In 2026–2027, the Board will introduce a monthly Start Here resource package, clarify the Champion role, and differentiate supports for secondary schools.

Goal 2: Support the integration of identity-affirming social emotional learning and mental health literacy into classroom practices

Wayfinder was introduced in Kindergarten to Grade 3 classrooms, with 431 educators registered through School Mental Health Ontario by June 2026, complementing grade-specific mental health modules and ongoing professional learning. Staff reported greater use of emotional check-ins, co-regulation, and practices that promote connection and belonging, though implementation varied across schools. Recognizing that staff wellbeing is foundational to student outcomes, strategies for adult regulation and wellness were embedded in professional learning and developed in collaboration with Human Resources. In 2026–2027, the Board will expand Wayfinder into Grades 4 to 8, use school-level MDI data to guide classroom wellness planning, and continue Sources of Strength presentations for Grade 7 students with the Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council.

Priority #4: SYSTEM LEADERS & ADMINISTRATORS: Aligned system-level leadership in mental health literacy and trauma-informed practices

MYSP connection: Supports **Learning** by strengthening leadership capacity and shared understanding of mental health literacy, and supports **Belonging** by fostering consistent, safe and inclusive school cultures.

Goal 1: Support system Leaders and administrators in building a shared and aligned understanding of mental health literacy within a broader vision of wellbeing that is inclusive of spiritual wellness, equity and inclusive education, healthy schools and safe and inclusive learning environments.

In 2025–2026, the Board implemented School Mental Health Ontario's Leadership Cascade Model at the senior leadership level. Through five in-person sessions at Academic Council, delivered by the Mental Health Lead, Social Work Lead, and Superintendent responsible for Mental Health, senior leaders explored the connection between mental health and learning, the multi-tiered system of care, PPM 169, and translating system planning into student impact. The three-year Mental Health and Addictions Strategy was shared with administrators, Student Services, and Program Services, and board-wide learning developed with the Equity department addressed trauma-informed and anti-racist practice, with Family of Schools follow-up sessions supporting application in schools. In 2026–2027, the Board will extend the Leadership Cascade to school administrators and strengthen coordinated planning and messaging across Faith, Equity, Deep Learning, Safe Schools, Program Services, and other portfolios.

Goal 2: Facilitate aligned and sustained system-level leadership in mental health by supporting leaders to embed mental health and wellness into school and board improvement planning, and foster identity-affirming, trauma-informed school cultures.

Mental health content was included in five administrator meetings, equipping leaders with practical tools, data-informed strategies, and consistent messaging. Leadership conversations throughout the year also addressed emotional regulation, trauma-informed practice, anti-bullying, anti-stigma, human trafficking awareness, and mental health promotion, strengthening alignment between system priorities and school-level practice. In 2026–2027, leaders will be supported to use wellbeing data to set identity-affirming mental health goals within school and board improvement plans, and an integrated monthly release will share trauma-informed prevention and promotion strategies across schools.

Priority #5: COMMUNITY & PARTNERSHIPS: Cross-sectoral collaboration, communication and planning in support of an integrated multi-tiered system of school and community-based mental health supports

MYSP connection: Supports **Belonging** by strengthening community partnerships and shared responsibility for student wellbeing, and supports **Serving** by improving coordination, communication, and pathways to care across system.

Goal 1: Strengthen & enhance collaboration and communication with key community mental health and addictions partners in alignment with the tiered model of school mental health supports and services

Protocols, MOU's, and established pathways to care continue to underpin the Board's working relationships with local mental health and addiction community-based service providers. We remain committed to building knowledge and understanding of community services. We are members of several community-based committees and meet with agencies to maintain clear pathways to care.

Goal 2: Advance cross-sectoral mental health service planning in alignment with Right Time Right Care

In partnership with the coterminous English and French, Catholic and Public Boards, the Youth Wellness Hub (Lang's Farm) and Starling Community Services (mental health lead agency), we are engaged in a Right Time Right care process. Provincial coaches support and guide the work to map service pathways & analyze system strengths and gaps.

Looking ahead to 2026–2027

A continued focus on Right Time Right Care will support the identification of strengths and needs to guide an integrated system of school and community-based mental health and addiction support for WCDSB students.

Recommendation:

This report is for the information of the Board.

Prepared/Reviewed By:

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Chief Executive Officer

Gerald Foran
Superintendent of Learning

Andrea Snyder
Mental Health Lead

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*4.2 DIRECTOR Monitoring Reports: Where the Board receives from the CEO a monitoring report that flows from a responsibility delegated to the Director under Board Policy – except where approval is required by the Board on a matter delegated by policy to the Board – the minutes of the Meeting at which the Report is received shall expressly provide that the Board has received and approved of the Report as an action consistent with the authority delegated to the CEO, subject in all instances to what otherwise actually occurred.