

DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT



2020 - Newsletter - 2021

**BUILDING
TOMORROW
TOGETHER**



**WE HAVE BIG
PLANS FOR A
BRIGHT FUTURE**

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



*Erin Kelly,
Director of Education*

Experience was a wise, but demanding counsellor as we made preparations for the 2020-21 school year, the first full year under the constraints necessary to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The final four months of the previous school year were unique for everyone. We earned incredible insight into the mechanics and logistics of on-line learning. We discovered new and innovative ways to deliver education effectively. We all explored and expanded the limits of our perseverance and our patience and I really appreciate everyone's efforts.

Planning for the 2020-21 school year was unprecedented - preparing students and staff who hadn't been in a traditional classroom for nearly 16 weeks - twice as long as a typical summer break.

We began unparalleled collaboration and communication with students, staff, families and our community partners.

2020-21 School Year

Reopening Schools

In June 2020 we sought the opinions and ideas of GECDSB families through a Reopening Our Schools Survey. The foundation was our guiding principles for reopening: addressing safety concerns and mitigating risks for students, staff and families; maximizing student-teacher (face to face) learning opportunities; planning for effective transition to full time schooling or at-home learning; providing consistency in scheduling; and safe reopening of schools.

Thousands of people completed the brief questionnaire helping us shape what became our Reopening Schools Plan.

Attendance Confirmation

The GECDSB Reopening Plan was posted to the website and shared through all our communication vehicles. With that information in hand, in August, parents and guardians were asked to complete a brief survey to confirm students' attendance for the coming school year. The information they provided further assisted with the planning and organization of schools for cohorts, transportation, and learning needs.

Many students and families were choosing to physically distance themselves and opted for on-line education.

The establishment of GECDSB Virtual Elementary and Secondary Schools was made necessary by the demand for on-line learning, with 4,780 students registered in elementary and 2,935 in secondary school.

Yet another group of 2,376 elementary students received a third option, paper packages - a correspondence model - which required the development of unique, board-wide logistics and services. Families chose this system to improve individual safety - especially for vulnerable students and family members - or because of limited access to technology and to reduce screen time.

More than 150 teachers were assigned to these students, with a full range of elementary programs including RISE, GAINS, FSL and French Immersion. The learning packages contained 2 weeks of individualized learning materials with instructions for the adult at home to facilitate the learning. Each week, teachers communicated with the families to offer support, check in to assess progress and provide feedback. Packages were couriered to students' home schools for pick up and completed packages were returned, then assessed, by teachers at the home school.

Our Safety Response to COVID-19

A comprehensive safety plan was developed that relied on science and the best advice of medical and health professionals in our community. Following the direction of the Ministry of Education, we had protocols and guidelines in place and each school was prepared to respond to all potential circumstances expected as a result of the pandemic.

Our Health and Safety and Facility Services personnel effectively and efficiently instituted all the necessary precautions competently and diligently. Risks, of course, could only be mitigated, not eliminated.

We benefitted from the strong relationship we have always had with the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit to support the well-being of our staff, students and their families throughout the year. They were very responsive to our needs and provided resources that kept everyone informed.

As well, we were very active in promoting a series of COVID-19 testing clinics at schools across the district. This was an initiative of the Ministry of Education and every school community was able to utilize this service at least once during the year.



2020-21 School Year

Staggering The Start

Creating two new on-line school communities with thousands of students required an enormous effort by senior administration and human resources personnel to reorganize staff in a very short period of time.

Secondary principals also made a sizeable contribution with the organization of students into their In-person Adapted Learning model cohorts.

By the final week of August we were ready, but it was obvious that with numerous staffing changes and new schedules that starting school as previously - and traditionally - scheduled on the day after Labour Day would be difficult for everyone. So, a staggered start was composed beginning on Thursday, September 10th.

Students in the virtual schools had an on-line orientation module to complete and those using the correspondence model were contacted by teachers with some initial instructions.

Reaching Out

After the first month of the school year, once routines were established for students, we asked them about how things were going and how they were doing in a Student Well-being Survey. More than 4,000 students responded and the results led to a series of initiatives, based on the students' input.

We developed resources for teachers and parents that focused on reducing the students' anxious feelings about learning on-line.

Classroom presentations were prepared for and delivered to students on coping strategies and mindfulness.

We faced a tremendous obligation to be as certain as we could be that everyone knew of and understood the structure, requirements and responsibilities for the upcoming year. Our media department put together the following two videos.

[Reopening Schools](#) (minimizing risks and increasing safety for everyone) received in excess of 21,000 views and [Back to School \(with Bella\)](#) was produced for our primary grade students and families. More than 2,000 people viewed this amusing procedural video on what the youngest students could expect at school.

Special Education

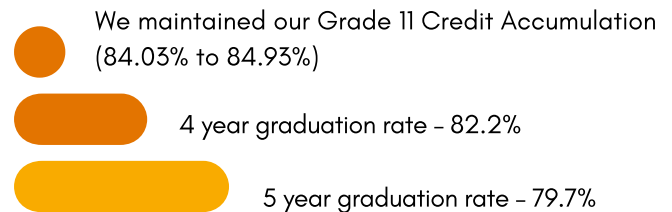
In the 2020-21 school year, the GECDSB invested additional funding to purchase 9,500 Lexia licenses to provide all primary students, students in Grade 6, and students in RISE with licenses to support reading development, whether students were in-person or learning remotely. As a result of this investment, 83% of students who met their usage advanced at least one grade level or more.

Student Re-Engagement

63% of our youth students who were contacted enrolled in our reengagement programs (116/159 with 36 graduates)

96% of our adult students contacted enrolled in our reengagement programs (48/50 with 29 graduates)

Student Graduation Rates



EQAO

Due to the extraordinary circumstances facing the province, all EQAO assessments for the 2020-21 school year were not conducted. As a result, the successful completion of the Ontario Secondary Schools Literacy Test (OSSLT - written by Grade 10 students each year), which is a requirement to obtain an Ontario Secondary School Diploma, was waived for students eligible for graduation this year.

Labour Relations

Remaining from the labour negotiations of the previous year was the finalization and implementation of collective agreements with our local unions representing our GECDSB employees.

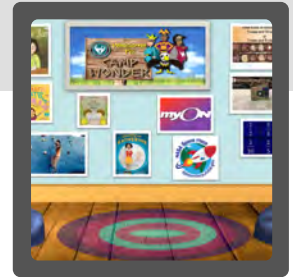
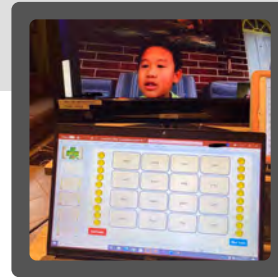
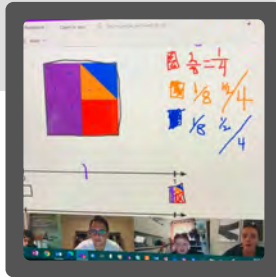
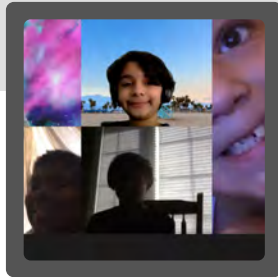
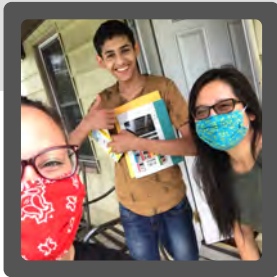
Following the lengthy process to secure provincial central agreements, to the great credit of our GECDSB teams as well as our union partners, the completion and ratification of collective agreements within our organization was amicable, respectful and productive for all involved.

2020-21 School Year

Summer Programming

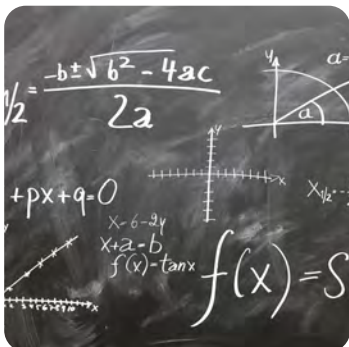
For the second consecutive year, the COVID-19 pandemic moved the annual Summer Learning Program to an on-line platform and what we learned the previous summer made things easier for us and the students.

During 3 weeks in July we operated 6 camps (Wonder, Mereville, Migizi, Lingo, Discovery and Stride). Each one focused on different learning needs: reading intervention; literacy & numeracy; French Immersion; de-streamed math; and well-being & mindfulness. Students were given unique boxes of learning materials to complement the interactive on-line sessions with teachers. As always, parent and family engagement remained a vital part of this program and was integrated into the first 15 minutes of each day.



Math Camp

Approximately 80 students who were entering Grade 9 in September were enrolled in a 10 day program to build their confidence in math. A group of teachers worked with students on-line through our Brightspace platform each day from 9:00 - 11:00 a.m.. They engaged in various math and number talks and activity-based lessons such as ratios, rates and percentages.



Indigenous Support

Indigenous artists, elders, educators and authors assisted students from throughout our board to deepen understanding of Indigenous knowledge, history and peoples through a variety of media.

Our commitment to reconciliation continues to develop and expand for students, their families and communities. Access to on-line resources has allowed us to utilize the services of a wide variety of outstanding Indigenous individuals from many places across the nation to engage many students at one time.

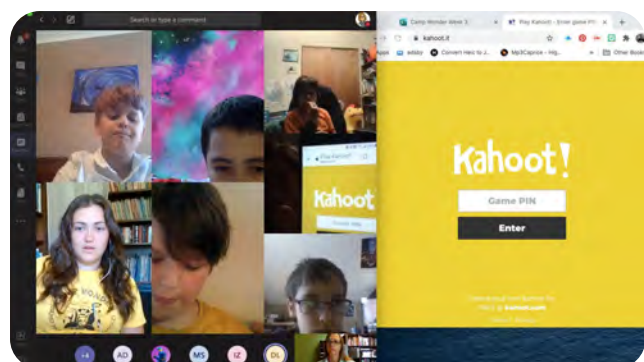
In June, the Art Gallery of Windsor along with Jessica Rachel Cook used virtual field trips to walk groups of students through works from the Indigenous Perspectives Through Art section at the Windsor Art Gallery. The tour featured video clips from the gallery, close-up images of artwork and installations.



Technology

It took an enormous effort by everyone in our Information Technology department to determine and support the technology needs of our students, their families and staff members for the start of the school year in September. Following the Technical Needs Survey we completed immediate requests from 1,820 students, 2,480 staff members and 111 families who were in need of internet services.

Throughout the year ITS expanded and refined its services and provided remarkable support to meet the incredible demand of maintaining devices and supporting the entire district.



2020-21 School Year

Return to On-line Learning

Keeping in mind the health and safety guidelines for masking, physical distancing and maintaining separation among cohorts of in-person learners the progress of the school year was relatively ordinary – all things considered. Until December.

An increase in cases in the community led the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit to order schools closed to students the week before the winter holiday break.

That remained in effect following the break and the return to school in January was on-line. We continued until the second week of February when we were permitted to return to in-person learning.

Spring break was rescheduled from March to April, but following that break, remote learning was once again imposed, province-wide which continued until the end of the year.

The changes were difficult for everyone – staff, students and their families – and we are grateful for the resourcefulness and flexibility which got us through to June. A great deal of learning was done, and not just through the curriculum. Many life lessons were learned and taught.



Mental Health and Well-Being

The emotional state of students and staff was certainly as much a concern during the pandemic as their physical health and well-being.

The constantly changing learning landscape and the corresponding uncertainty obliged us to provide what support and services we could and to promote the programs available to everyone in the community.

Beginning in late February we hosted a series of on-line presentations and discussions: Coping Together: Parenting Seminar Series.

Topics for the 6 sessions ranged from Managing Daily Stress to Building Resilience and Hope. They were conducted by professionals from our organization and throughout the community.

COPING TOGETHER: CAREGIVER SEMINAR SERIES 2021

FREE VIRTUAL SEMINAR SERIES – OPEN TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY
WEDNESDAY From 7:00PM TO 8:00PM

| |
|--|
| MANAGING DAILY STRESS Beth Moretto, MSW, RSW Individual and Family Therapist, Maryvale Adolescent and Family Services February 24th at 7:00pm |
| CREATING A DAILY ROUTINE Dr. Melissa Wawch, C. Psych. Psychologist (Supervised Practice), Maryvale Adolescent and Family Services March 3rd at 7:00pm |
| FINDING THE CALM IN THE MIDST OF AN EMOTIONAL STORM (SELF-REGULATION) Beth Moretto, MSW, RSW Individual and Family Therapist, Maryvale Adolescent and Family Services March 10th at 7:00pm |
| KNOWING WHEN TO ASK FOR HELP Mercy Quentey, MSW, RSW Individual and Family Therapist, Maryvale Adolescent and Family Services March 17th at 7:00pm |
| DUAL ROLES: CAREGIVER AND ACADEMIC COACH Sarah Remund, MSW, RSW Social Worker, Greater Essex County District School Board March 24th at 7:00pm |
| BUILDING RESILIENCE AND HOPE Danka Mijevic, MSW, RSW Social Worker, Greater Essex County District School Board March 31st at 7:00pm |

More information available at the following websites:
1. <https://www.maryvale.ca>
2. [Greater Essex County District School Board](https://www.greateressexcountydistrictschoolboard.ca)
[Click here to register](#)

If you have any questions about the seminars, please call 519-255-3200 extension 10231

Maryvale 

2020-21 School Year

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

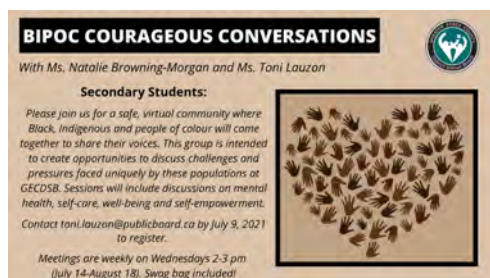
While world events expanded our awareness, generally, of the depth and consequences of anti-Black racism, we were alerted to deficiencies in our own efforts to address this systemically.

We realized that there is much more we can do to reduce negative impacts on staff and students' well-being and improve their ability to learn and work in a safe space, free of discrimination.

During this year we reached out to individuals and groups from the Black community, our staff and people with lived experience to help us. Meetings were held to gather input and determine needs. Steps were initiated to create an Equity Action Plan and we created a Black Staff Equity Alliance.

As well, we continued work following through on a Ministry of Education directive to eliminate streaming that has had such a negative effect on the education and future success of students who experience marginalization in our schools.

We actively sought more input to inform the process of developing our plans to enhance our policies and practices as a board. Professional development for teachers was enhanced with new resources, lesson plans and activities focusing on anti-Black racism. A group of tutors was also hired to work directly with students in Grades 7-12.



Student Leadership

Earlier in the year Student Trustees Arabella Soave and Isabel Unger conducted a student survey, which found their topics were: anti-racism education; environmental sustainability and mental health and well-being.

Regardless of the obstacles they faced, our student leaders were able to organize and execute their annual Student Leadership Conference. It was strictly an on-line event that had one advantage over the usual in person gathering.

The conference is usually limited to 260 students but by using Microsoft Teams, hundreds more had access to this development opportunity. The keynote speaker was Federal NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh who spoke to the students about his personal history in politics as a person of colour.

Environmental Stewardship

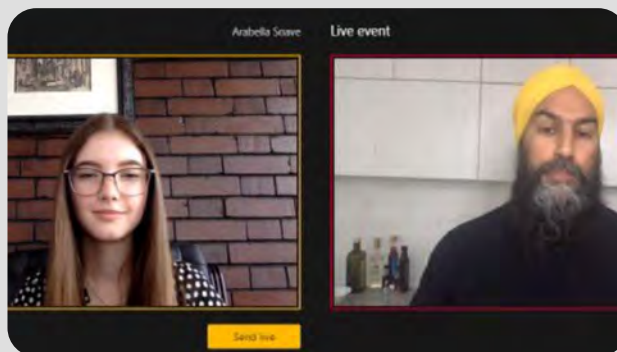


To support an effort that began the previous year - to eliminate single use plastics throughout the GECDSB - a committee was formed to discuss and suggest plans to get rid of this scourge from our environment.

Surveys were conducted among students and staff with large majorities agreeing with the benefits of reducing single use plastics. A plan has also been developed to eliminate a series of these items within the board over the next 2 years.

Throughout the year we made a concerted effort to increase the number of students getting to school on foot or on wheels. The recently formed GECDSB Active Transportation Committee worked, in collaboration with community partners, to reduce traffic at school sites before and after school, decrease pollution created by gas powered vehicles and improve the health and well-being of students.

We joined Ontario Active School Travel in their Drive to 5 campaign, in partnership with the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit were initiated at Talbot Trail, King Edward and M.D. Bennie public schools.





SOCIAL MEDIA GROWTH

2020 - 2021

With regular communication on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram the GECDSB has seen audience growth on all these key platforms.

We have created a more visual, consistent approach to our social media communication. This includes imagery, copy length and GECDSB brand colours.

A monthly reporting process has been implemented to track the performance of our social media content.

1.4K

TOTAL SOCIAL AUDIENCE GROWTH

5%

AVERAGE ENGAGEMENT RATE

185K

TOTAL ENGAGEMENTS
(LIKES, COMMENTS, SHARES, CLICKS)

2.7M

TOTAL IMPRESSIONS



New School Construction

Amherstburg

Signs of work began to appear in Amherstburg at the site of the new school which will replace General Amherst and Western secondary schools. The general contractor, Fortis Construction, started work on the \$24 million project in the fall.

A small ceremony was held to mark the commencement of the work, on the former location of Centennial Park. It included representatives from Western Secondary and General Amherst High, the two schools that will come together to form this new school community as well as myself and other officials from the GECDSB, J.P. Thomson Architects, Fortis, students and Amherstburg Mayor Aldo DiCarlo.

"In less than two years," Amherstburg Trustee LeClair told the gathering, "we will be opening this new school that will serve students, staff and the community with the same distinction that General Amherst and Western have."

James L. Dunn

Progress was made during the year on the new school in Windsor on Mercer St. which will replace Giles Campus French Immersion Public School.

Reshaping the existing building, the former International Playing Card factory into a school configuration has taken time, but the new structure, on the west side of the site began to make its appearance and the schedule remains to have the new school open for the 2022-23 school year.

In February, the Board of Trustees selected the name of James L. Dunn Public School for the new community. James Dunn is a noteworthy figure from the region's history. He fought to have his daughter enrolled at an all-white school, citing the school for Black children was under-funded and did not provide an adequate education.

Mr. Dunn also served as a school board trustee with the Windsor Board of Education and later was elected as the city's first Black alderman.

Legacy Oak Trail

Progress was steady on the new public school in LaSalle. Despite delays caused by provincially mandated restrictions, completion was still on schedule under the direction of our general contractor, Rosati Construction.

In November, following a meeting of the School Naming Committee, Legacy Oak Trail Public School was chosen as the name for the school. It is a reflection of the area's natural Carolinian Forest heritage along with the abundance of trails for walking, biking and hiking.



New School Construction

Eastwood/Parkview

In May we began construction of a new school in east Windsor that will replace Parkview and Eastwood public schools. The general contractor is Fortis Construction, who will realize the design of the WalterFedy architectural firm, with a projected completion for September of 2022.



North Shore

We completed the acquisition of a 5.79 acre site in Tecumseh for a new dual-track (English / French Immersion) school. The Ministry of Education provided funding of \$3.7 million for the purchase. The property is located north of Tecumseh Road just west of Arlington Blvd., which is near the current site of D.M Eagle Public School.

In May 2021, we debuted a design preview video of the school to allow families and members of the community to see what was planned. They were also given an opportunity to share their comments and suggestions via e-mail.



Essex Public School Child Care Addition

The completion of a longstanding project in Essex was closer to completion. An addition which would allow for the inclusion of a full-time child care facility as part of the building began to take shape.



Kennedy

A building nearing 100 years of age requires some gentle care and sometimes an aggressive restoration. W.C. Kennedy Collegiate Institute has gotten a lot of the former but in 2020 it got a \$5 million upgrade to its historic façade that stands guard near the entrance to Windsor's Jackson Park.

Original leaded glass windows were rejuvenated along with the brick and stone of the classic Gothic structure. A prominent feature, the brass name plaque over the front entrance, was buffed back to a gleaming shine.



2020-21 School Year

Facility Services

In the 2020-21 school year, the GECDSB received \$15.6 million in funding for 124 projects through the Resiliency Infrastructure Stream. These included upgrades to child care spaces, bottle filling conversion, ventilation renewal, cooling, WIFI access points and door hold openers. The tendering process and the management of these projects had Facility Services personnel working under very tight timelines for completion by December 31, 2021.

A number of improvement projects funded through School Condition Improvement funding were initiated: unit ventilation and boiler upgrades in 7 schools; chiller replacements at Sandwich Secondary and Westview Freedom Academy and site work at Dougall Public School.

Two large scale projects were undertaken with the use of School Renewal funding.

- At Sandwich Secondary, work began on the renewal of all science labs and the renovation and relocation of the STEPS classroom, for completion by October, 2021.
- At Walkerville Collegiate, a two-year renewal project commenced with the renovation and renewal of the library and cafeteria, repurposing of the pool area and existing music room into dance, music and drama learning spaces, replacement of all windows and refurbishment of all masonry.

To support staff development, 19 custodians participated in the St. Clair College “Facility Services Maintenance Management Program” in 2020-21. This seven-month long program, to be completed in September 2021, provides potential work opportunities for qualified individuals in the Building Maintenance panel.

Conclusion

Together we faced, met and overcame many challenges during the 2020-21 school year. Standing out among our many achievements was the creation and development of important relationships. We will continue to re-examine, improve and expand our consultation, cooperation and coordination with all segments of our organization and our partners in the community. We look forward to the learning and building of understandings in the areas of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

I appreciate the exceptional effort and concern of my senior team, school administrators, our staff and the GECDSB Board of Trustees for all the success we experienced during the year.

It is because of these connections that I feel we have, through the adversity, increased our capacity to care for and support one another.

Erin Kelly



January 2022