

NIAGARA CATHOLIC



2020 DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT



NIAGARA CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Niagara Catholic District School Board,
through the charisms of faith, social justice,
support and leadership,
nurtures an enriching Catholic learning community
for all to reach their full potential,
and become living witnesses of Christ.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

It is always a challenge for a new Director of Education to submit a Director's Annual Report to the Ministry – so many things happened in the year when someone else was in charge.

Coming to Niagara Catholic during a pandemic made for an interesting start to my Directorship. Everything you would expect to see in a report – all of the milestones and celebrations, the images of activities in schools – didn't happen. Despite that, great things DID happen in 2020 in Niagara Catholic schools, and there ARE lots of things to celebrate.

I am very grateful to my preceding Director, John Crocco, who shepherded Niagara Catholic through six very difficult months, from March through the end of August. His commitment and dedication, and the commitment and dedication of the previous Senior Administrative Council, set the bar for me and the new Senior Team to continue to move things forward as students and staff returned to learning in September.

There have been challenges throughout the past few months, but as a team, we chose to view them not as obstacles, but as learning opportunities for our students, our staff, our families and for ourselves.

This report is an overview of 2020; arguably a year in education unlike any other. I am profoundly grateful to be a part of the Niagara Catholic District School Board; to learn what makes it distinctive within Niagara, and so special to the families and communities it serves, and to share this report with you.



Incoming Director of Education, Camillo Cipriano, and retiring Director John Crocco on Mr. Crocco's final day.

ABOUT NIAGARA CATHOLIC

The Niagara Catholic District School Board is the English-Catholic school board in the beautiful Niagara region. Niagara Catholic serves more than 20,000 students and their families in 12 urban and rural communities across nearly 1,900 kilometres, from Fort Erie to West Lincoln. The Niagara Region has a population of 447,888 (2016 census), and Niagara Catholic is supported by approximately 100,000 ratepayers.

23,202 STUDENTS

2,905 Continuing Education
13,905 Elementary
6,392 Secondary



FACILITIES

68



51 Catholic Elementary Schools
10 Catholic Secondary Schools
4 Continuing Education Schools
3 Administrative Sites
Niagara Launch Centre

2,388 STAFF

948 Elementary teachers
451 Secondary teachers
886 Support Staff
96 Administrators



TRUSTEES

10



Eight elected trustees
Two student trustees

FAITH FORMATION

Niagara Catholic schools are far more than places where faith is learned. Our schools are places where our faith is lived.

As we began 2020, we looked forward to sharing our faith in many ways, at Masses and celebrations, through Lenten and Holy Week activities, and sharing the joy of the sacraments of Reconciliation, Communion and Confirmation with those marking these very special milestones on their faith journeys. But 16 days into the Lenten season, it all came to a halt.

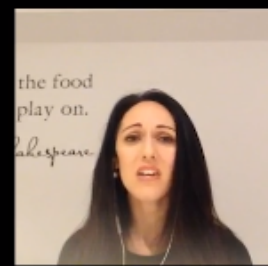
When it became clear that we would have to shift the way in which we celebrated our faith, Niagara Catholic's Chaplaincy Team, under the direction of Chaplaincy Leader Krista Wood, found creative ways to continue to keep staff, students and families engaged in faith throughout the school shutdown. Beginning on Good Friday, we launched Faith Fridays, a series of short, faith-based messages that continued throughout the remainder of the school year.

Catholic Education Week was celebrated virtually, which included an incredible musical performance of the week's theme song, *Hope*, by our Elementary Arts Team. Mental Health Awareness Week falls in the same week as Catholic Education Week, and Niagara Catholic celebrated both through the faith lens.

Our Chaplaincy Team also supported faith and mental health through *Chaplaincy Chats*, which allowed anyone struggling to have a short session with a chaplain to help them through a challenging time.

Communions and Confirmations that were cancelled in the spring were safely celebrated in the fall. School Mass celebrations have taken place since the school year began in September, but they are strictly limited in size. Parish priests continue to maintain a relationship with their school communities, with virtual visits as the norm, particularly as we entered the Orange zone in November. Our Annual Pilgrimage, one of the signature social justice events in our school year, took place virtually in 2020, with each participating school giving students the opportunity to participate in Pilgrimage in a very different – but no less meaningful – way than in the past, to support our brothers and sisters in need at home and around the world.

FAITH FORMATION



Students and staff from Cardinal Newman Catholic Elementary School (now St. John Henry Newman CES) performed *Lord, I Need You* for Holy Week.



SEEDS OF FAITH
MASS • MERCY • MISSION
2018-2021

Niagara Catholic's three-year theological theme was at its half-way point in 2020.

Ironically, it focused on the concept of mercy. We all had to learn more about the grace mercy offered us during this very difficult year.

MENTAL HEALTH AND STUDENT SUPPORT

Social distancing. Physical distancing. Remote learning. Even the words sound negative, and over the course of the pandemic, many individuals – not just those with diagnosed mental health challenges – have found the time apart from school, friends and loved ones stressful. Niagara Catholic's Mental Health Team was a key supporter of student and staff wellness during the pandemic, particularly during the shutdown, but also through the first three months of the 2020-2021 academic year.

Mental Health Monday was the first of our themed video days, created by our Mental Health Lead, Andrea Bozza. These 30-second to one-minute clips shared tips and resources for students and staff to access when they felt overwhelmed by the isolation and by distance learning. Our Child and Youth Workers continued to provide our online classrooms with evidence-based prevention programming, and our Social Workers continued to provide virtual therapy and check-ins with our students struggling with mental health challenges.

Through the summer with additional funding, two Social Workers were added to the team, to provide support to our summer learning program. Students were able to access clinical therapy, and full online classrooms were supported with awareness and psychoeducation.

In August, our Mental Health Lead created a return to school plan for all staff, which included a half-day PD session focused on the transition back to school in September, and COVID-19 and anxiety, and highlighted how staff and students can access resources and mental health support.

As the new school year began, Niagara Catholic increased the team from four in June 2020 to eight to begin September 2020, and an additional two Child and Youth Workers, increasing the team to 25. Our Child and Youth Workers continue to provide classroom-based lessons focused on social-emotional learning and coping skills, and our Social Work team is providing clinical therapy both in-person in schools, and virtually to our virtual students.

Since the year has started, our Mental Health Team has supported schools whenever there has been a positive COVID-19 case, ensuring that all students and staff feel comfortable and welcome when classrooms reopen.

**Socially distanced
Pink Shirt Day at
Saint Michael Catholic
High School During
Bullying Awareness
and Prevention Week.**



STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT, SUCCESS, AND 21ST CENTURY LEARNING

In addition to nurturing the distinctiveness of Catholic education, Niagara Catholic's Strategic Directions focus on *Advancing Student Achievement for All*.

Niagara Catholic schools are safe, caring, accepting and inclusive learning and teaching environments, where staff meet students where they are on their educational journey. We teach the whole child as a child of God, and focus on learning and progress for all students, so that each one can meet their full potential. Through the support and guidance of staff, students discover their God-given gifts and talents, and are encouraged to develop their capacity for leadership.

Schools closed until the end of the year in March, but learning continued through June, and students and staff adapted to the world of online learning quickly, supported by a team of staff working behind the scenes.

Before the school year ended, Niagara Catholic was able to hold our annual Pathways Speakers Summit to help guide students to existing and emerging career opportunities. Approximately 350 people turned out for the event in February.

Niagara Catholic also hosted its annual Technology Skills Competition in the first week of March, and handed out the awards to participants, days before the schools were closed.

Thanks to the commitment of many staff at the central level, Niagara Catholic students and their families had access to resources to support synchronous and asynchronous learning throughout the remainder of the school year.

As we returned to school in September, we continued to focus on ensuring that student success was at the forefront. In October, Niagara Catholic participated in a program for young women to learn more about a rewarding career in the skilled trades through a partnership with Niagara College and Ontario Power Generation called *Exploring Your Future – Dream It, Believe It, Do It* virtual speakers' series, which will run into early 2021.



EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVENESS

Niagara Catholic continues to focus on equity and inclusive education to ensure that all students feel safe, accepted, and a sense of belonging as part of their school communities.

Niagara Catholic continues to reinforce the message of the importance of equity, justice and well-being as part of our New Teacher Induction Program. The Board also continued the promotion of goal-setting related to equity and inclusive education as part of the System Priorities, and the Board and School Improvement Plans for Student Achievement and Well-Being (SIPSAW).

Professional learning in Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP) continues to support educators. Niagara Catholic is a leader among school boards across Canada by providing resources from the Rick Hansen Foundation School Program to support students becoming champions of accessibility and inclusion in their schools and communities.

This year, Niagara Catholic received a grant from the Niagara Community Foundation to partner with a community group, Tools of Empowerment for Success Niagara, which will allow us to focus on providing a mentorship program for Black students called *What They See is What They Will BE*, that will launch in January 2021.



**Niagara Catholic
Student Senate**

THANK YOU!

STUDENT VOICE

This has proven to be a challenging year for our elementary and secondary Student Senators, who look forward each year to several key events including our Graduation Celebration and Student Leadership Conference.

Despite losing these signature events as a result of labour issues and COVID-19, the students continued to move forward, meeting virtually, holding their annual elections and playing a key role in our Catholic Education Week celebrations. They also participated in our Thank You Thursdays video campaign during the school shutdown, thanking staff for their commitment to students. Student Senate also continued the tradition of choosing two students to receive the Student Senate Scholarship - announcing the recipients virtually instead of at the Annual Graduation Celebration.

As the new school year began, our two Student Trustees continue to be important voices at the Board for students, and continue to plan for virtual student engagement activities for the remainder of the school year.

ENHANCING TECHNOLOGY FOR OPTIMAL LEARNING

Niagara Catholic has invested heavily in technology throughout 2020, some planned, such as a much-needed upgrade to our Father Burns Board Room to ensure that the Wi-Fi access in the room meets the needs of our staff and trustees, and much of it as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, Niagara Catholic purchased 1,400 Chromebooks and hundreds of new virtual desktops to create a better user experience for students, and 200 Wi-Fi enabled tablets for students to assist with distance learning. The Board also invested in technology for staff who are teaching virtually, including large LCD monitors, headsets, webcams and hotspot devices.

The Board invested in platforms that allowed staff to work virtually, including Zoom and Microsoft Teams, and new portals were developed for students and staff through the NCVLE, and ensured that students had access to learning, including the provincial platform, Brightspace, and Google Classroom.

During the initial school closure, Information Technology Services and Niagara Catholic technology teachers also worked in partnership with 3D PPE GTHA, an organization set up to create much-needed PPE for frontline workers during the early days of the pandemic. To assist, Niagara Catholic deployed the Board's eight 3D printers to make components for face shields and were then distributed to hospitals and organizations in Niagara, Hamilton and Toronto.



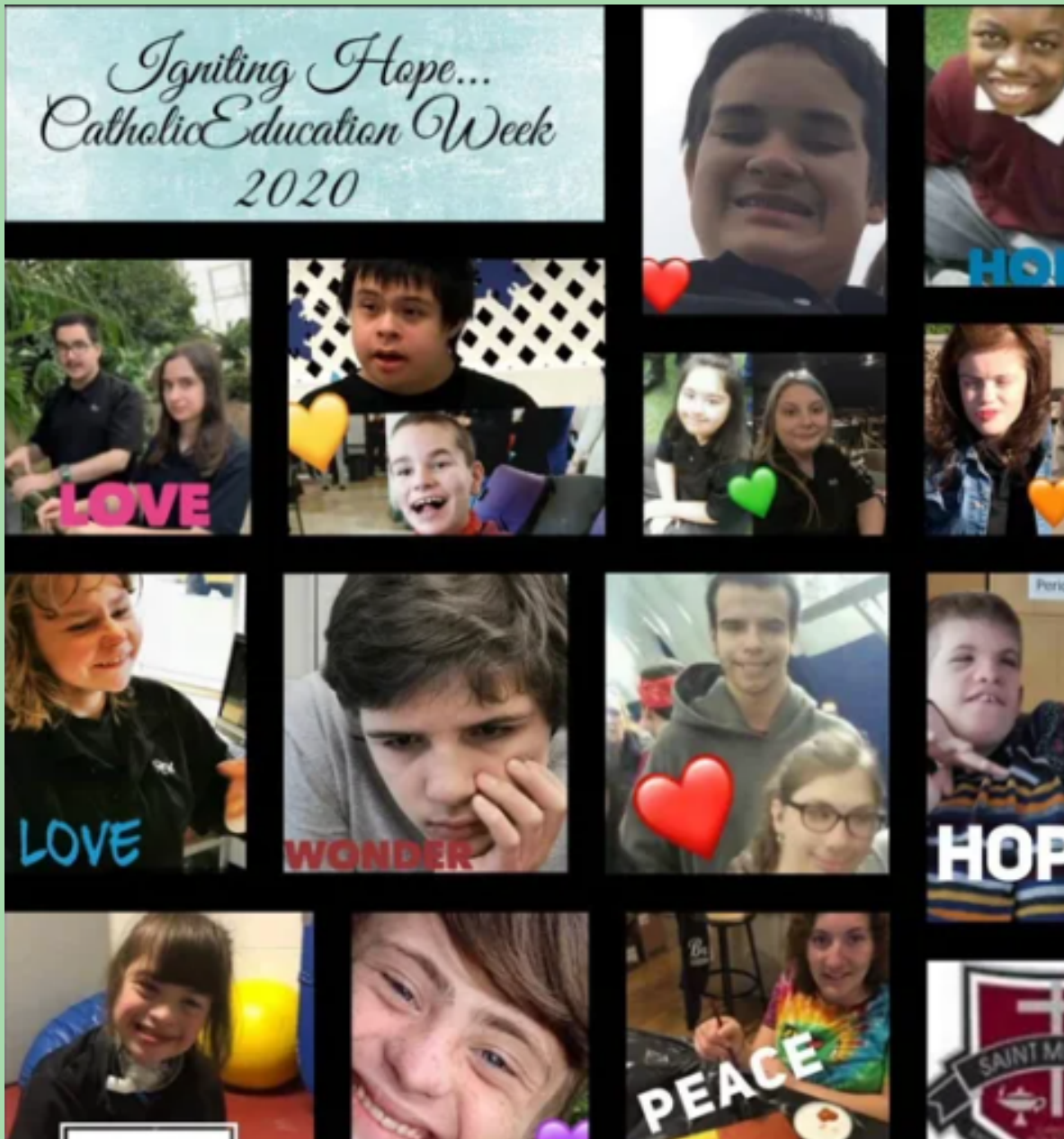
Niagara Catholic IT Computer Technician Allan Northeast displays some of the PPE made at home during the shutdown using our Niagara Catholic 3D printers.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

The Niagara Catholic District School Board is committed to the inclusion of students with special education needs within their home schools and in their age-appropriate classes.

As a result of this philosophy, the model of program delivery is rooted in a seamless approach to serving students with special education needs from Early Years to graduation. Niagara Catholic is also committed to the philosophy that all students within its jurisdiction are provided with the opportunity to develop their independence.

By accessing programs, services and supports, students will maximize their potential in order to receive an education commensurate with their identified needs and learning goals.



**A defining image
for 2020:
Niagara
Catholic's Special
Education
students were
front and centre
in our Catholic
Education Week
video, *Igniting
Hope.***

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Students who participate in international travel programs have the opportunity to not only broaden their own minds by the experience but also broaden the minds of the students they interact with during the stay.

Niagara Catholic has an outstanding International Students program, which welcomes students from around the world to our schools for long and short stays.

COVID-19 made travel challenging in 2020, but we still managed to host 398 students this year. Following very stringent federal and provincial guidelines, Niagara Catholic brought students safely to Canada for the first term of the current academic year.

While many of the travel opportunities and gatherings during their stay have not been possible due to physical distancing requirements and limits on gathering sizes, we know that the students who visited Niagara Catholic from 31 countries around the world are learning about life in Canada, while sharing a global perspective with Canadian students in our schools.

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Niagara Catholic believes that a person's educational journey lasts their entire life.

Sometimes, people take breaks from their educational pathway, and look to resume and complete their formal education at different times of their lives to further their careers or participate in new opportunities.

Niagara Catholic has four Catholic Continuing Education Learning Centres in Niagara where students can complete or upgrade their education. In addition to the traditional credit delivery in class, Continuing Education provides the following programs: E-learning credit classes, non-credit academic upgrading, English as a Second Language classes, Language Instruction for newcomers, Teaching English as a Second Language Certification, the Personal Support Worker Certification, International and Indigenous Languages for elementary students, learning outside the school day programs, summer school programs for elementary, secondary, and adult students, adult dual-credit programs with Niagara College, and travel-for-credit opportunities for secondary school students during the school year. Despite school closures in March, Continuing Education shifted its programs to virtual, synchronous delivery to provide students with the opportunity to complete their studies.

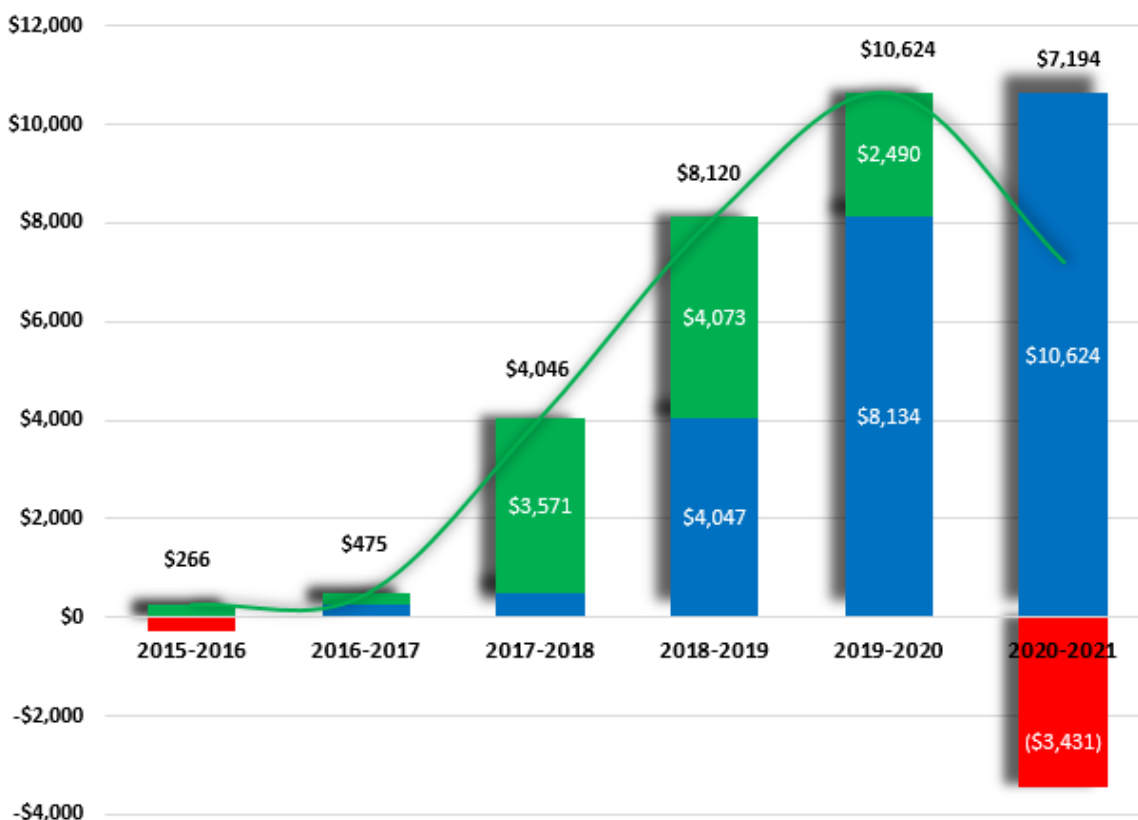
This year, summer school programs switched to virtual delivery, providing students with the opportunity to participate in reach-ahead and upgrade courses, along with other non-credit based programs.

ANNUAL BUDGET

Niagara Catholic Board of Trustees and Senior Staff recognize and value the priority of strong financial stewardship for the Board. This commitment to fiscal responsibility has resulted in a four consecutive year-end surplus for the Board for 2019-2020. The continued growth in the Board's surplus allows for greater flexibility in responding to costing pressures, contingency plans, and planning. We are pleased to be in full compliance with all Ministry of Education financial requirements, and continue to ensure our resources align with our annual Strategic Priorities to achieve the Board's Vision 2020 Strategic Plan.

Since COVID-19 has emerged as an unprecedented public health issue, the government has been diligently monitoring the developing situation to protect the health and well-being of all Ontarians. The government recognizes the significant impact this has had on families, students, schools, and the broader community. Federal and provincial funding includes targeted new investments to support school boards in responding to the COVID-19 outbreak and to address the unique learning needs of students, including a new Supports for Students Fund. However, the pandemic continues to present financial challenges to local school boards including Niagara Catholic, which continues to anticipate a 2020-2021 operating deficit.

Operating Accumulated Surplus ('000)



FACILITIES SERVICES

Facilities Services has always played a key role in our schools and sites across Niagara Catholic, ensuring that they are safe, healthy environments for students, staff and guests.

Never has that been more important than in 2020. Immediately after schools and offices closed in March, our Facilities Services team provided enhanced cleaning in all of our schools and sites. They secured playgrounds to prevent access, in accordance with provincial and municipal health guidelines, and they completed maintenance projects for schools reopening in September.

School-based Facilities Services staff helped install directional arrows and other important COVID-related signage in schools, decommissioned water fountains, and have ensured touchpoints in our schools have been thoroughly cleaned on the recommended schedule. Niagara Catholic hired an additional 45 casual caretakers to address the needs in our schools, and has used the \$554,000 in provincial funding to purchase PPE, portable air purifiers and disinfectant sprayers. In schools that have had cases of COVID-19, our Facilities Services staff have ensured that we are in compliance with all Public Health expectations, which has helped limit the spread of the virus in our schools.

In the midst of all of this, Niagara Catholic was pleased to learn the Ministry of Education has approved and funded a plan to consolidate St. Charles and Monsignor Clancy Catholic Elementary Schools at the Monsignor Clancy site, under the new name, Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Catholic Elementary School, paying homage to its local parish. Construction is underway at the school, and we look forward to the school opening in early 2022.

In September, the Ministry also announced funding for a new joint-use school with our coterminous board in Wainfleet. Students at St. Elizabeth Catholic Elementary School will soon share the new space on Sugarloaf Street in the village with students from three schools in our coterminous board. The St. Elizabeth location is ideal for the new school, with its proximity to the village's public library and arena, as well as to St. Elizabeth parish.

We also look forward to a \$2.5-million addition to Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Elementary School, building three child care rooms to accommodate 49 new childcare spaces for students.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

On the day that the government announced schools would close for two weeks following the March Break, Niagara Catholic staff had spent the day discussing how to continue to provide programs such as Physical Education and vocal and instrumental music in schools.

Since then, everything we have done – from designing programming to communications – has been done with COVID-19 in mind. We have had to drastically shift the way we share our news and information, the programs we offer, and the open-door policy of our schools to visitors such as parents, speakers and other special guests.

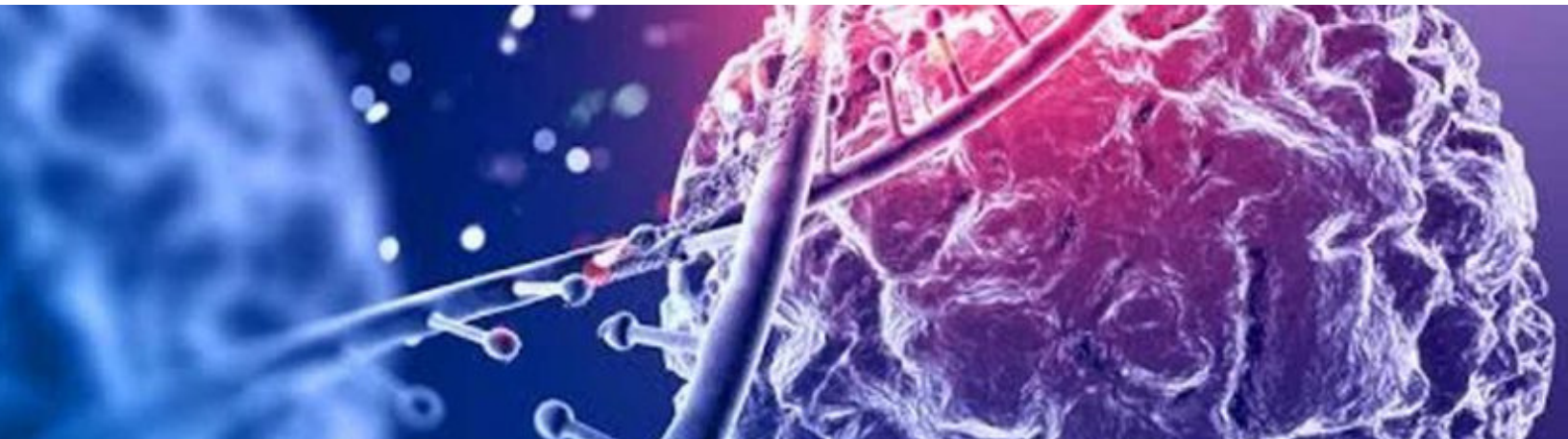
Nearly four months into the new school year, we have settled into a routine that works well for the system. Our two Board COVID leads are the point staff for reporting cases to Public Health and to the Ministry of Education, and co-created our Board's School Reopening Plan, and a COVID-19 Administrator's Guide, which provides a number of templates for principals to follow in the event of a case in their school.

They also ensured that a case counter was placed on the Board website, which discloses to all stakeholders the number of cases in our schools, and the dates they are resolved.

Every single area and department has been integral in ensuring that we are meeting the needs of students and staff across our system, while remaining COVID-compliant in all we do.

School administrators are also providing leadership in ensuring that all messaging is delivered to families in a prompt and consistent way, and have led by example within their schools.

Our takeaway from nine months of this experience is that Niagara Catholic has a strong system that is well-positioned to ensure the smooth, safe operation of all of our schools and sites as we continue to navigate COVID-19, likely until the end of this academic year.



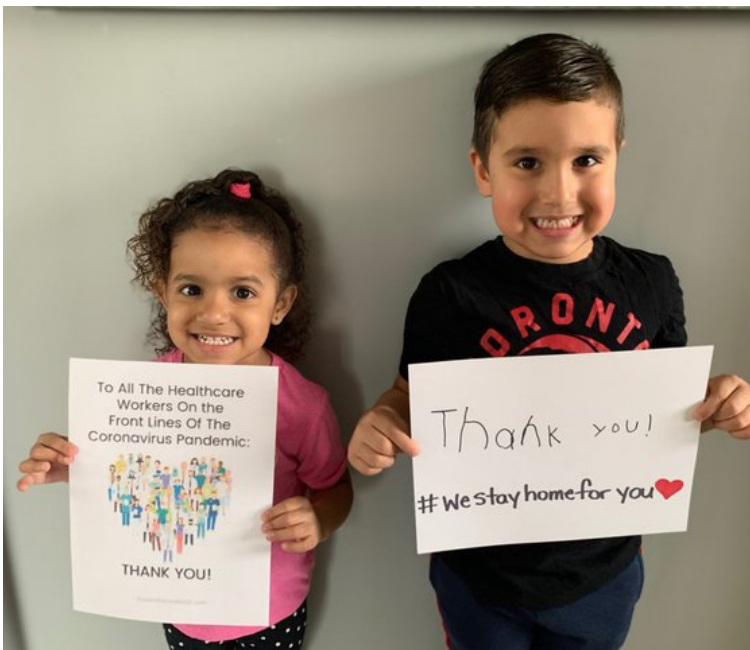
MILESTONES

In a typical year, Niagara Catholic would celebrate retirees and long-service employees at a dinner in June, but COVID-19 made those plans impossible. This year, we had 50 staff retire from Niagara Catholic, including Director of Education John Crocco, and Superintendents of Education Yolanda Baldasaro and Frank Iannantuono, and Controller of Facilities Services Scott Whitwell. We pray that all of our 2020 retirees are blessed with long, happy and healthy retirements.

Congratulations to Tony Gambale, Program Chair of Canadian and World Studies and Social Sciences, who won received a *Difference Maker Award* from the Rick Hansen Foundation in June.

We were also unable to celebrate our Class of 2020 with our traditional Graduation Celebration in May. However, schools held virtual graduation celebrations in the spring, and again in the fall, to recognize the Class of 2020.

In November, we celebrated the blessings of the newly named St. Teresa of Calcutta and St. John Henry Newman Catholic Elementary Schools, renamed after their namesakes obtained sainthood.



Messages of hope and love spread across Niagara Catholic throughout the spring, from photos sent in by parents of their children thanking essential workers, to school staff sharing how much they miss the students, it was all about love and kindness in a challenging time.

2020 SENIOR STAFF



Top left: Niagara Catholic's Senior Team through August 31, 2020.

Bottom pic, from top left: Director of Education, Camillo Cipriano, Controller of Facilities Services Clark Euale, Superintendents of Education Ted Farrell, Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells (centre left), Kim Kinney, and Gino Pizzoferrato, and Superintendent of Business and Financial Services Giancarlo Vetrone.



NIAGARA CATHOLIC BOARD OF TRUSTEES



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PAUL TURNER

On December 1, 2020, Niagara Catholic held its Annual Organizational Meeting. Larry Huibers was elected Chair for 2021, and Dan Moody was elected Vice-Chair.

Created by the Communications Department for the Director of Education, December, 2020



NIAGARA CATHOLIC
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD



SEEDS OF FAITH
MASS · MERCY · MISSION
2018-2021