



*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.*

*AGENDA AND MATERIAL*

## COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2022  
6:30 P.M.**



*PUBLIC ACCESS LIVE STREAM LINK*  
<https://niagaracatholic.ca/meetings-livestream/>

### **A. ROUTINE MATTERS**

1. Opening Prayer – Trustee Huibers -
2. Roll Call -
3. Approval of the Agenda -
4. Declaration of Conflict of Interest -
5. Approval of Minutes of the Committee of the Whole Meeting of January 11, 2022 A5
6. Consent Agenda Items -
  - 6.1 Elementary and Secondary School Year Calendars 2022-2023 A6.1
  - 6.2 Staff Development Department Professional Development Opportunities A6.2
  - 6.3 Capital Projects Progress Report Update A6.3

### **B. PRESENTATIONS**

### **C. COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORTS**

1. The Empower™ Reading Program – Gino Pizzoferrato C1
2. Niagara Student Transportation Services 2021-2022 Annual Plan – Giancarlo C2
3. Monthly Updates -
  - 3.1 Student Senate Update -
  - 3.2 Senior Staff Good News Update -
  - 3.3 Trustee Good News -

### **D. INFORMATION**

1. Trustee Information

### **E. OTHER BUSINESS**

1. General Discussion to Plan for Future Action -

**F. BUSINESS IN CAMERA**

Nil

**G. REPORT ON THE IN CAMERA SESSION**

Nil

**H. ADJOURNMENT**

**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE  
FEBRUARY 8, 2022**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TOPIC: MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE  
MEETING OF JANUARY 11, 2022**

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**RECOMMENDATION**

**THAT** the Committee of the Whole approve the Minutes of the Committee of the Whole Meeting of January 11, 2022, as presented.



## MINUTES OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING

### TUESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2022

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Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee of the Whole of the Niagara Catholic District School Board, held on Tuesday, January 11, 2022 in the Father Kenneth Burns c.s.c. Board Room, at the Catholic Education Centre, 427 Rice Road, Welland.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Vice-Chair Moody.

#### A. ROUTINE MATTERS

1. Opening Prayer

Opening Prayer was led by Trustee Burtnik.

2. Roll Call

Vice-Chair Moody noted that all Trustees and Student Trustees were in attendance.

Trustee	Present	Present Electronically	Absent	Excused
Rhianon Burkholder		✓		
Kathy Burtnik		✓		
Frank Fera		✓		
Larry Huibers		✓		
Daniel Moody		✓		
Leanne Prince		✓		
Dino Sicoli		✓		
Paul Turner		✓		
<b>Student Trustees</b>				
Sydney Yott		✓		
Steffen Zylstra		✓		

The following staff were in attendance:

**Camillo Cipriano**, Director of Education; **Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells, Kimberly Kinney, Gino Pizzoferrato, Pat Rocca**, Superintendents of Education; **Domenic Massi, Joseph Zaroda**, Associate Superintendents of Education; **Giancarlo Vetrone**, Superintendent of Business & Financial Services; **Clark Euale**, Controller of Facilities Services; **Anna Pisano**, Recording Secretary/Administrative Assistant, Corporate Services

**3. Approval of the Agenda**

Moved by Trustee Prince

**THAT** the Committee of the Whole approve the Agenda of the Committee of the Whole Meeting of January 11, 2022, as presented.

**CARRIED**

**4. Declaration of Conflict of Interest**

No Declaration of Conflict of Interest was declared with any items on the Agenda.

**5. Approval of Minutes of the Committee of the Whole Meeting of December 7, 2021**

Moved by Trustee Sicoli

**THAT** the Committee of the Whole approve the Minutes of the Committee of the Whole Meeting of December 7, 2021, as presented.

**CARRIED**

**6. Consent Agenda Items**

**6.1 Holy Childhood Association Fundraiser**

Presented for information.

**6.2 Staff Development Department Professional Development Opportunities**

Presented for information.

**6.3 Capital Projects Progress Report Update**

Presented for information.

Moved by Trustee Burkholder

**THAT** the Committee of the Whole adopt consent agenda items.

**CARRIED**

**B. PRESENTATIONS**

**C. COMMITTEE AND STAFF REPORTS**

**1. Board Improvement Plan Process Update**

Kimberly Kinney, Superintendent of Education presented the Board Improvement Plan Process Update.

Superintendent Kinney answered questions of Trustees.

## 2. **Back to School Update**

Director Cipriano provided a Back to School reentry plan.

Director Cipriano answered questions of Trustees.

## 3. **Monthly Updates**

### 3.1 **Student Trustees' Update**

Sydney Yott, and Steffen Zylstra, Student Trustees, presented a brief verbal update on the current activities of the Student Senate.

### 3.2 **Senior Staff Good News Update**

Senior Staff highlights included:

#### **Superintendent Zaroda**

- In collaboration with our community partners, business and local government agencies, Niagara Catholic was able to distribute approximately 500 food bags to our students and families in need throughout the Niagara Region. Each Secondary school was provided with 25 bags, 50 bags went to Continuing Education and the remaining distributed to our students within alternative education. We were fortunate to have a group of retired Niagara Catholic "Elves" delivering this year. Thanks to Dan Di Lorenzo, Frank Iannantuono, Ralph DeFazio, Mark Lefebvre, and Dean Stunt for distributing food bags as well as gifts to various families sponsored and supported through various donations received including financial support from our Niagara Catholic Senior Admin Team. A Special Thank You goes to Principal John Belcastro, Marco Magazzeni and the entire Pope Francis team for their help, support, and organization!
- Chris Rudd from Wise Guys Charity Fund stopped by the Catholic Education Centre on December 23 2021, to present a \$20,000.00 grant to be utilized for healthy cooking initiatives, food and nutrition for students and families in need. Staff applied for funding to Wise Guys Charity Fund and were successful in being a recipient for the 2021-2022 school year. Thank you to Wise Guys for all your support not only to Niagara Catholic but throughout the Region of Niagara!
- On December 14, 2021 Niagara Catholic received \$2,250.00 from Welland Economic Development Commission's annual Captains of Industry Golf Tournament along with \$1,000.00 from Kim Robinson of REMAX Welland and \$2,000.00 from John Howard Society of Niagara. These funds were used to support our annual food bag distribution through Niagara.
- Niagara Nutrition Partners graciously provided Niagara Catholic with an additional \$1,900.00 in grocery gift cards to provide to six families in need at St. Andrew's school. These generous gift cards will be delivered to the St. Andrew's school and their families the week of January 10, 2022

## D. INFORMATION

### 1. **Trustee Information**

#### 1.1 **Draft 2022 Board Committee Membership**

Director Cipriano highlighted the Draft 2022 Board Committee Membership.

## **E. OTHER BUSINESS**

### **1. General Discussion to Plan for Future Action**

1.1 Director Cipriano noted the January Board meeting will continue to be virtual.

## **F. BUSINESS IN CAMERA**

Nil

## **G. REPORT ON THE IN-CAMERA SESSION**

Nil

## **H. ADJOURNMENT**

Moved by Trustee Prince

**THAT** the January 11, 2022 Committee of the Whole Meeting be adjourned.

**CARRIED**

This meeting was adjourned at 7:59 p.m.

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Minutes of the Committee of the Whole Meeting of the Niagara Catholic District School Board held on **January 11, 2022.**

Approved on **February 8, 2022.**

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Daniel Moody  
Vice-Chair of the Board

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Camillo Cipriano  
Director of Education/Secretary -Treasurer

**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING  
FEBRUARY 8, 2022**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TITLE: THE EMPOWER™ READING PROGRAM**

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The Empower™ Reading Program in Niagara Catholic report is presented for information.

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Prepared by: Gino Pizzoferrato, Superintendent of Education  
Danny Giancola, Student Success Coordinator  
David O'Rourke, Student Success Coordinator  
Jim DiGioia, Student Success Coordinator

Presented by: Gino Pizzoferrato, Superintendent of Education  
Danny Giancola, Student Success Coordinator

Approved by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: February 8, 2022





## **REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE FEBRUARY 8, 2022**

### **THE EMPOWER READING PROGRAM IN NIAGARA CATHOLIC**

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#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

"Reading is a fundamental skill that students must have to navigate their school experience and their later lives. Students with reading disabilities have the right to learn to read" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2021). The Right to Read inquiry, led by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), has allowed parents, students and educators across the province to share their experiences, challenges and concerns as it relates to literacy education in our schools. Thousands of stakeholders from across the province offered their feedback and expertise for how literacy education to those with reading disabilities or at risk for these disabilities was being provided in Ontario's public education system. The inquiry also assesses whether school boards use scientific evidence-based approaches to meet students' right to read. The OHRC has selected specific school boards to assess their compliance with their obligation to provide equal treatment to students with reading disabilities or those at risk. The OHRC wrote to the Ministry of Education and school boards, advising them to "establish plans and programs to systematically and consistently address the needs of students with disabilities for the 2020–2021 school year" (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2021). The final report will include detailed findings and recommendations for government, school boards, faculties of education and others on curriculum and instruction, early screening, reading interventions, accommodation, professional assessments and systemic issues. Niagara Catholic looks forward to receiving this report in the hope that it will provide further direction for how Niagara Catholic can address the needs of its most vulnerable students through the implementation of Tier 3 reading intervention strategies and supports.

Niagara Catholic has a long-standing history of implementing programs that serve the changing needs of struggling readers and those receiving special education supports and services. Programs or strategies like Reading Recovery, Simultaneous Multisensory Teaching Program (SMT), Neurological Impress Reading Method (NIM), Reading Strategies that Work and Intervention Strategies for Struggling Readers have been used to support students with literacy deficits. Technology such as Dragon Naturally Speaking, Co-Writer, Clicker 5, Write Out Loud, Kurzweil and Google Read and Write have been adopted by Niagara Catholic to support students with literacy gains. Many of these resources still exist in our schools and complement language programs as supplemental resources to the core reading program.

Niagara Catholic continues to evolve and respond to system needs at this time by implementing a research-based program that addresses the literacy needs of students with reading disabilities or those at risk. The Niagara Catholic Strategic Plan for 2021-2026 provides clear objectives for students, staff, families, and community partners. The Empower™ program is embedded within our goal to "Advance student achievement for all students" and serves as a strong response to the much-anticipated report from the Ontario Human Rights Commission - Right to Read Initiative.

Niagara Catholic implemented The Empower™ Tier 3 Reading intervention program as a pilot, in October 2021. Special thanks are extended to the Student Support Coordinators, Program Resource Teachers, pilot

school principals and vice-principals, and our Empower™ teachers for their dedication to implementing this program at our twenty-six pilot schools. We would also like to recognize The Hospital for Sick Children Empower staff for their ongoing support and collaboration during all implementation phases.

Empower™ Decoding and Spelling (Grade 2-5) program targets the development of essential reading skills in a structured and systematic way to assist with student success on the literacy pathway. Successful reading skill development in the early years prepares students for success in all curriculum areas. Intervention measures to address deficiencies in reading skill development are essential for students who do not develop the prerequisite skills in the early years.

The Empower™ Reading and Learning Group through the Hospital for Sick Children brings evidence-based literacy instruction to students with reading challenges. This program focuses on supporting students in grade two to grade five through developing reading strategies supported by comprehensive instructional pedagogy that targets two core areas of literacy development: decoding and spelling. Part of the implementation of this program involves professional development for teachers to ensure that the knowledge and skills needed to confidently and effectively teach the Empower™ Reading program are provided. This professional development takes place over four days throughout the year and has been carefully crafted by the Hospital for Sick Kids. Training days are strategically scheduled to allow teachers to effectively deliver the program in phases during this initial year of implementation. This training practice allows for the scaffolding of instructional support so that teachers can establish robust methods. The training incorporates instructional strategies that are research-based and effectively combined with a formal teacher-mentor component that our previous programs did not offer. The mentor provides ongoing monitoring and support to staff. This training model ensures fidelity to program design and implementation. It ensures that staff use the systematic and intentional instructional approaches embedded in the program correctly to assist students in achieving the ultimate goal of improving their decoding and spelling skills. The mentor also allows teachers to collaborate and problem solve throughout the first and subsequent years of implementation. Any challenges encountered by the teacher may be brought to the attention of a professional Empower™ mentor where solutions can be achieved in a timely manner.

The Empower™ program has proven its effectiveness in many school Boards and is doing the same here in Niagara Catholic. The Empower™ program allows trained Empower™ teachers to address the needs of larger groups of students in one setting. In contrast, the previously referenced resources and programs have been used in one-to-one or small group instructional settings to enhance the core program being taught in the classroom. For example, the Reading Recovery model was such that a teacher scheduled individual student time throughout the day and may have seen up to eight total students per day. Reading Recovery was delivered to one student at a time and only allowed service to our grade one population. Similarly, Communication Disorder Assistants (CDAs), under the Speech-Language Pathologist's supervision, provided critical support in language development for primary students that were identified through assessments completed by SLPs. This support was offered once per week for half an hour. Goals were reviewed monthly, and students transitioned in and out of support based on how identified goals were being met. Students were eligible for CDA support until the end of grade 3.

Our trained Empower™ teachers deliver the program in groups of six to eight students across the primary and junior divisions, with three groups taught at a pilot site. Teachers provide one hour of full instruction per day for each student group they service. Although the Empower™ Reading Program is designed for students in grades two to five, we have been able to extend the program to include some grade six students who met entry criteria and would otherwise have missed this opportunity. By capturing some of our grade six students, we expect improvement in their reading ability to support their academic success as they transition into the intermediate grades and beyond. Empower™ positions students to transfer skills back to their classroom environment where these strategies can be used across all curriculum areas. The overall impact of Empower™ is its unique potential to serve the needs of a larger number of students with the commitment of a properly trained teacher in a shorter amount of time.

Currently, two hundred and eighty-seven total students are split between forty-six groups Board-wide in our 2021-2022 implementation. The majority of our students are in grades four and five who make up a total of fifty-nine percent of participants. Providing Empower™ to this group of students has allowed them to improve their literacy development early in their academic journey, setting them up for future success with critical reading skill development. Two hundred and twenty-three or seventy-eight percent of students in Empower™ are on an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Most students in Empower™ are on an IEP, which includes specific accommodations and/or modifications in their literacy program. Approximately twenty-two percent of our students are working without an Individual Education Plan, and we expect Empower™ to reduce the future need for these Special Education Services. Thirteen or approximately five percent of students have a formal identification through an Identification Placement Review Committee (IPRC). This number of students is a typical value for this sample size and age group. The IPRC does not prevent nor influence the educational programming provided to students. Twenty-two or approximately eight percent of students in the pilot have a specific learning disability in reading.

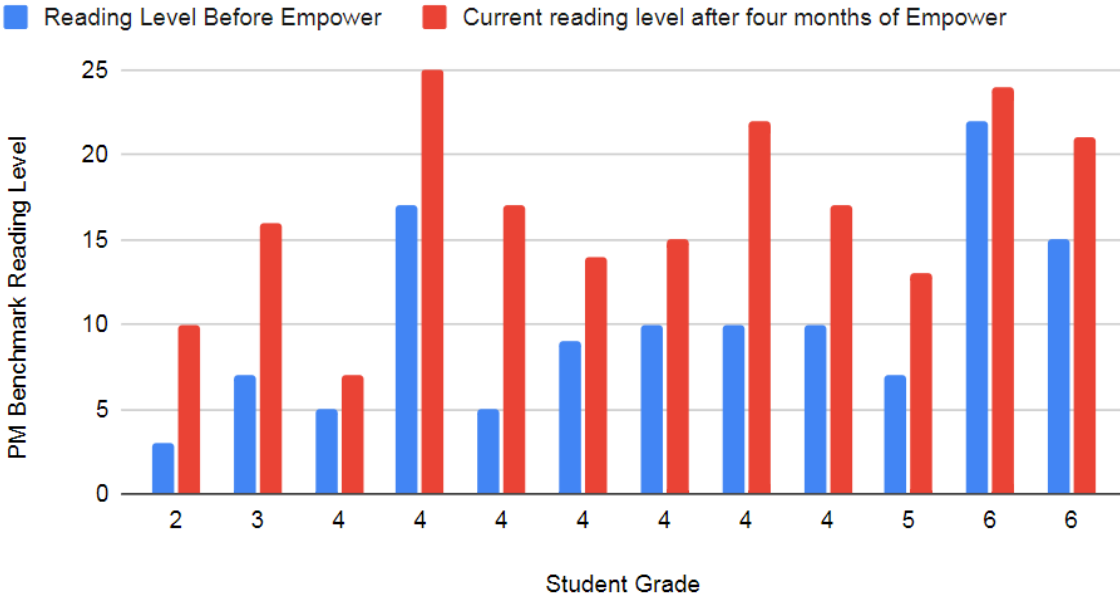
Parents/Guardians, Principals, Vice-Principals and teachers have witnessed the success that students have realized at this stage in the year and continue to benefit through their dedicated participation in the daily sixty-minute small group instructional sessions. Although we are still in the beginning stages of learning and implementation, initial results and feedback are encouraging, as evidenced through measured student progress.

A PM Benchmark Reading Assessment is designed to explicitly assess students' instructional and independent reading levels using accurately grade levelled fiction and non-fiction texts. The chart below shows the expected reading level range for students in grades two to six.

Developmental Level	Grade	PM Benchmark - Nelson Education	
Early Fluent	Grade 2	17	
		18	
		19	
Fluent	Grade 3	20	
		21	
		22	
		23	
	Grade 4	24	
		25	
		26	
		27	
	Grade 5	Grade 5	28
			29
30			
Grade 6	Grade 6		

Although our sample set of data indicates that most students are still below grade level with their reading scores, they have made an average gain of six PM Benchmark levels in four months while being in the Empower™ program, as the following graph shows. Gains of this nature may be achieved in some cases over a one-year period or more for students with literacy deficits who are not benefiting from a Tier 3 program such as Empower™. With the delivery of the Empower™ reading program, these gains are being achieved over a four-month period. The graph below represents a student sample size showing October 2021 reading levels of students before starting the Empower™ program and their January 2022 level of achievement after four months of participating in Empower™.

# Empower Impact on Student Reading (4 months)



This data indicates very encouraging results in a short period. The personal feedback received by students, teachers, principals, and families is even more promising.

### Students are saying...

"The Rhyming Strategy is my favourite part because I can figure out bigger words with small words I already know."

"I like that I get to practice my reading with just a few other kids and not have my whole class around when I have to read with my (classroom) teacher."

"Whenever I get stuck on a word in my Harry Potter book, I use the strategies, and they help me to read. It works!"

### Teachers are saying...

"My student avoided reading at all costs at the start of the school year, and now he asks if he can read with me every day."

"For the first time, my student reads a paragraph at grade level. In September, he seemed stuck several years behind his classmates."

"The mentoring aspect of the program is excellent as it allows us to ask specific questions directly related to student learning in the program."

"I see my students are beginning to transfer the lessons learned in Empower™ to their regular classrooms."

"The growth I have seen in students, in such a short time, is very reassuring. I feel very confident that they will continue to grow and reach their grade level in reading. This program has been a timely blessing for our students."

### Principals are saying...

"Empower™ provides an opportunity to bridge the learning gap that these very specific students need."

"Empower™ has been the most positive, empowering lessons that I've seen used in the last ten years."

"Empower™ gives students the strategies they need to become literate."

"Quiet students are now participating and asking questions."

"The students involved have progressed in their reading levels, but more importantly, their confidence and engagement have noticeably improved. I am hoping that this program will be continued and expanded next year."

**Parent(s)/Guardian(s) are saying...**

"It has now been four months that she has been in the program, and we can't believe the difference. Her confidence and reading strategies have soared."

"My son says he really enjoys going to the Empower™ group because he says the Rhyming activities feel like a game, not work."

"I'm thankful for this program as the extra time, and attention has been good for him."

"My son often comes home from school and is excited to model and share new strategies he learned during the day."

At this time, we are pleased to report the initial success of the Empower™ Reading Program and continue to monitor as we assess the inclusion of this program in the remaining elementary school sites in Niagara Catholic. We remain optimistic in our endeavour to offer this program in Niagara Catholic to support Tier 3 students with their literacy development as a response to the "Right to Read" inquiry report. We look forward to aligning services offered through Student Support with those of Program and Innovation as we scaffold the delivery of a balanced literacy model, addressing the needs of all learners. The Student Support Department is looking forward to continuing our work with Empower™ as a Tier 3 intervention level of service that will allow students to reach their full potential in mind, body and spirit.

#### Work Cited

Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2021). *Right to Read: public inquiry into human rights issues affecting students with reading disabilities* | Ontario Human Rights Commission. Retrieved February 2, 2022, from <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/right-read-public-inquiry-on-reading-disabilities>

The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids). (2021). *Empower™ Reading and Learning Group*. SickKids. Retrieved February 2, 2022, from <https://www.sickkids.ca/en/learning/empower-reading/>

The Empower™ Reading Program in Niagara Catholic report is presented for information.

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Prepared by: Gino Pizzoferrato, Superintendent of Education  
Danny Giancola, Student Success Coordinator  
David O'Rourke, Student Success Coordinator  
Jim DiGioia, Student Success Coordinator

Presented by: Gino Pizzoferrato, Superintendent of Education  
Danny Giancola, Student Success Coordinator

Approved by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: February 8, 2022

**TO: NIAGARA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MEETING  
FEBRUARY 8, 2022**

***PUBLIC SESSION***

**TITLE: NIAGARA STUDENT TRANSPORTATION SERVICES 2021-  
2022 ANNUAL PLAN**

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The Niagara Student Transportation Services 2021-2022 Annual Plan report is presented  
for information.

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Prepared by: Giancarlo Vetrone, Superintendent of Business & Financial Services  
Lori Ziraldo, Past Executive Director, Niagara Student Transportation Services (NSTS)  
Sarb Sandhu, Executive Director, Niagara Student Transportation Services (NSTS)

Presented by: Giancarlo Vetrone, Superintendent of Business & Financial Services

Approved by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: February 8, 2022



## **REPORT TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE FEBRUARY 8, 2022**

### **NIAGARA STUDENT TRANSPORTATION SERVICES 2021-2022 ANNUAL PLAN**

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#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Each year the Niagara Student Transportation Services (NSTS) publishes an annual plan for key stakeholders in the Niagara Region. To ensure complete alignment and consistency with our partnering School Board (Niagara District School Board) this annual plan will be presented for information to the Board of Trustees for review on an annual basis.

As Niagara Student Transportation Services readies to celebrate fifteen years of service in March of 2022, the team continues to meet the challenges and fulfill their mandate and mission of providing safe, effective and efficient transportation services to the students of Niagara.

In the 2021-22 school year, there are 34,697 students eligible for transportation and 32,299 students transported with projected expenditures of \$32.6. Due to COVID-19, not all eligible students are riding the bus, 2,398 are attending virtual school or Opted-Out of transportation. Both school boards are projected to have expenditures equal to student transportation Grants for Student Needs (GSN) and will flow through COVID-19 additional funding of \$2M to service providers to cover related extraordinary costs. In the 2021-22 school year, the cost per student transported for DSBN is projected to \$1,098 and for Niagara Catholic \$874.

The Niagara Student Transportation Services key objectives in the 2021-2022 Annual Plan are as follows:

1. Driver recruitment and retention to alleviate service impacts from route and spare driver shortages;
2. Set clear roles, responsibilities and expectations for staff, and provide the appropriate supports, for ongoing organization effectiveness;
3. Align resources and processes to support staff, school and family communication to effectively respond to increased students eligible for transportation due to growth, alleviate capacity pressures on buses and to respond to driver and vehicle concerns

The following information is attached for the review of the Trustees:

Appendix A: Niagara Student Transportation Services Annual Plan 2021-2022



The Niagara Student Transportation Services 2021-2022 Annual Plan report is presented for information.

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Prepared by: Giancarlo Vetrone, Superintendent of Business & Financial Services  
Lori Ziraldo, Past Executive Director, Niagara Student Transportation Services  
Sarb Sandhu, Executive Director, Niagara Student Transportation Services

Presented by: Giancarlo Vetrone, Superintendent of Business & Financial Services

Approved by: Camillo Cipriano, Director of Education/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: February 8, 2022



**NIAGARA STUDENT TRANSPORTATION SERVICES  
2021-2022 ANNUAL PLAN  
December 2021**



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## NIAGARA STUDENT TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

### Who Are we?

Niagara Student Transportation Services (NSTS) is a consortium between the District School Board of Niagara and the Niagara Catholic District School Board.

NSTS was established in 2007 and is incorporated as a not for profit organization.

### Mission Statement:

NSTS is committed to student success by providing safe, effective and efficient transportation services to the learners of Niagara!

## 2021-22 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**Warren Hoshizaki**  
President

**Camillo Cipriano**  
Vice-President

**Giancarlo Vetrone**  
Director/Chairperson Management  
Advisory Committee

**Stacy Veld**  
Director/Vice-Chairperson Management  
Advisory Committee

**Simon Hancox**  
Director

**Domenic Massi**  
Director

### OFFICER

**Lori Ziraldo**, Retire December 31, 2021

**Sarb Sandhu**, Effective January 4 2022

Executive Director  
Secretary to the Board

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MESSAGE

Niagara Student Transportation Services (NSTS) is well positioned to continue delivering safe, effective and efficient transportation services well into the future.

In the last five-years, NSTS has faced many challenges presented by driver shortages, staff retirements and COVID-19. During this time, NSTS also implemented several improvement initiatives including procured stable contracts, implemented the bus video surveillance program, advanced active school travel and implemented business continuity measures.

The team continues to dig deep and move forward together to meet all challenges presented, while working towards improvement initiatives for the betterment of student transportation in Niagara and contributing to the school bus sector at large.

The team's strength is attributed to the workplace culture that is greater than any one person. Since inception in March 2007, NSTS has demonstrated a collective commitment to continuously improve and deliver results for our member school boards, families, service providers and community partners.

I welcome Sarb Sandhu as the Executive Director effective January 4, 2022. Sarb's leadership and understanding of what it takes to be successful behind the wheel of a bus will benefit student transportation professionals in Niagara for years to come.

As NSTS celebrates 15-years in March 2022, the team is strong and ready to meet the challenges to fulfill our mandate of providing safe, effective and efficient transportation services to the students of Niagara.

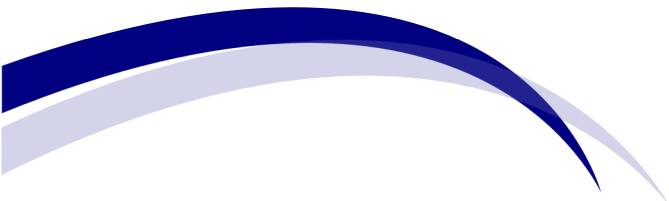
*L Ziraldo*





## KEY CONSORTIUM MILESTONES

School Year	Milestone Achievement
2006-07	DSBN and Niagara Catholic signed Consortium Agreement to form NSTS and filed as a corporation under the Corporations Act of Ontario.
2007-08	Integrated the student database of both school boards for transportation planning purposes to start planning as a single entity.
2008-09	First school year operating as a single entity with staff serving students of both school boards in specific geographic areas.
2009-10	Implement harmonized policies and administrative procedures for both school boards and ranked Moderate-High on first Effectiveness & Efficiency Review.
2010-11	Implemented new planning and routing software by Georef to support enhanced data management, route planning and secure web portals.
2011-12	Implemented competitive procurement in West Niagara , harmonized all service offerings and implemented major efficiency projects across Niagara.
2012-13	Achieved High rating on Effectiveness & Efficiency Review.
2013-14	Achieved full compliance to BPS Procurement Directive, equipped 100% of vehicles with GPS.
2014-15	Modernized First Ride program for students new to the bus and for students with individualized transportation needs.
2015-16	Implemented Intertrain in presentations for school bus safety and behaviour management program in schools.
2016-17	Office moved to St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Elementary School and commenced initiatives to support driver recruitment and retention.
2017-18	Added two new staff positions to recognize increasing demands on resources from alternative education, special programs and driver shortage challenges.
2018-19	Hosted first Niagara School Bus Professionals event and negotiated contract solutions to improve driver recruitment and retention.
2019-20	Implemented extended contracts on 70% of routes, camera program on 25% of routes and experienced service disruption due to COVID-19.
2020-21	Implemented competitive procurement on 30% of routes, modified services to respond to COVID-19, and business continuity measures, including SaaS, and added new position to support Executive Director.



## ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

### Mission

NSTS is committed to student success by providing safe, effective and efficient transportation services to the learners of Niagara!

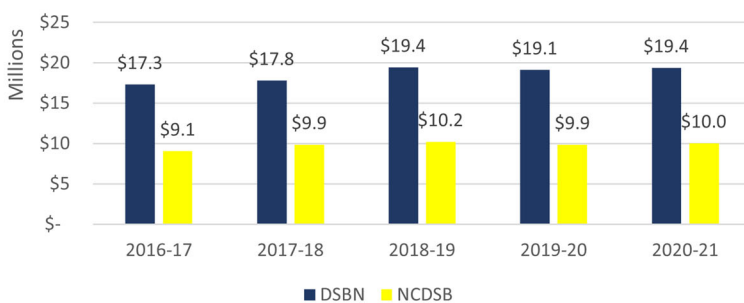
### Scope & Financials

In the 2021-22 school year, there are 34,697 students eligible for transportation and 32,299 students transported with projected expenditures of \$32.6. Due to COVID-19, not all eligible students are riding the bus, 2,398 are attending virtual school or Opted-Out of transportation.

Both school boards are projected to have expenditures equal to student transportation Grants for Student Needs (GSN) and will flow through COVID-19 additional funding of \$2M to service providers to cover related extraordinary costs.

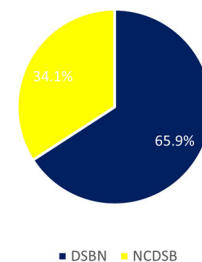
In the 2021-22 school year, the cost per student transported for DSBN is projected to \$1,098 and for Niagara Catholic \$874. For historical context, the following charts represent the previous five years:

**Transportation Expenditure by Board**

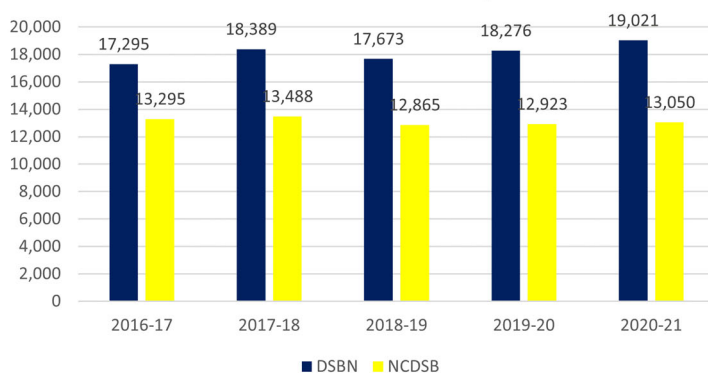


**Percentage Expenditures Per Board**

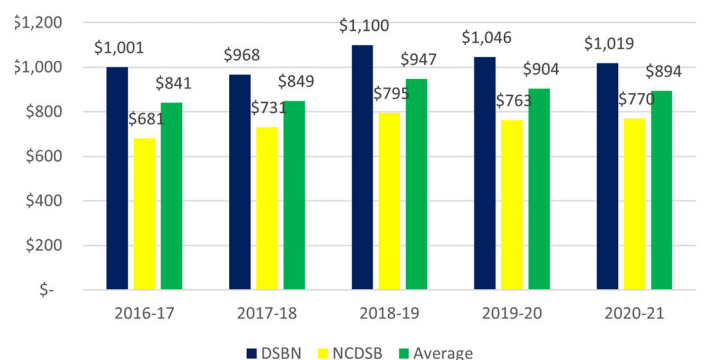
Total \$29,427,702

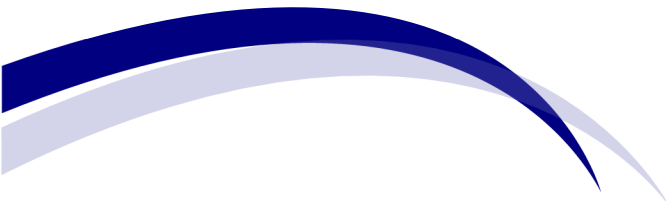


**Number of Students Transported**



**Cost Per Transported Student**



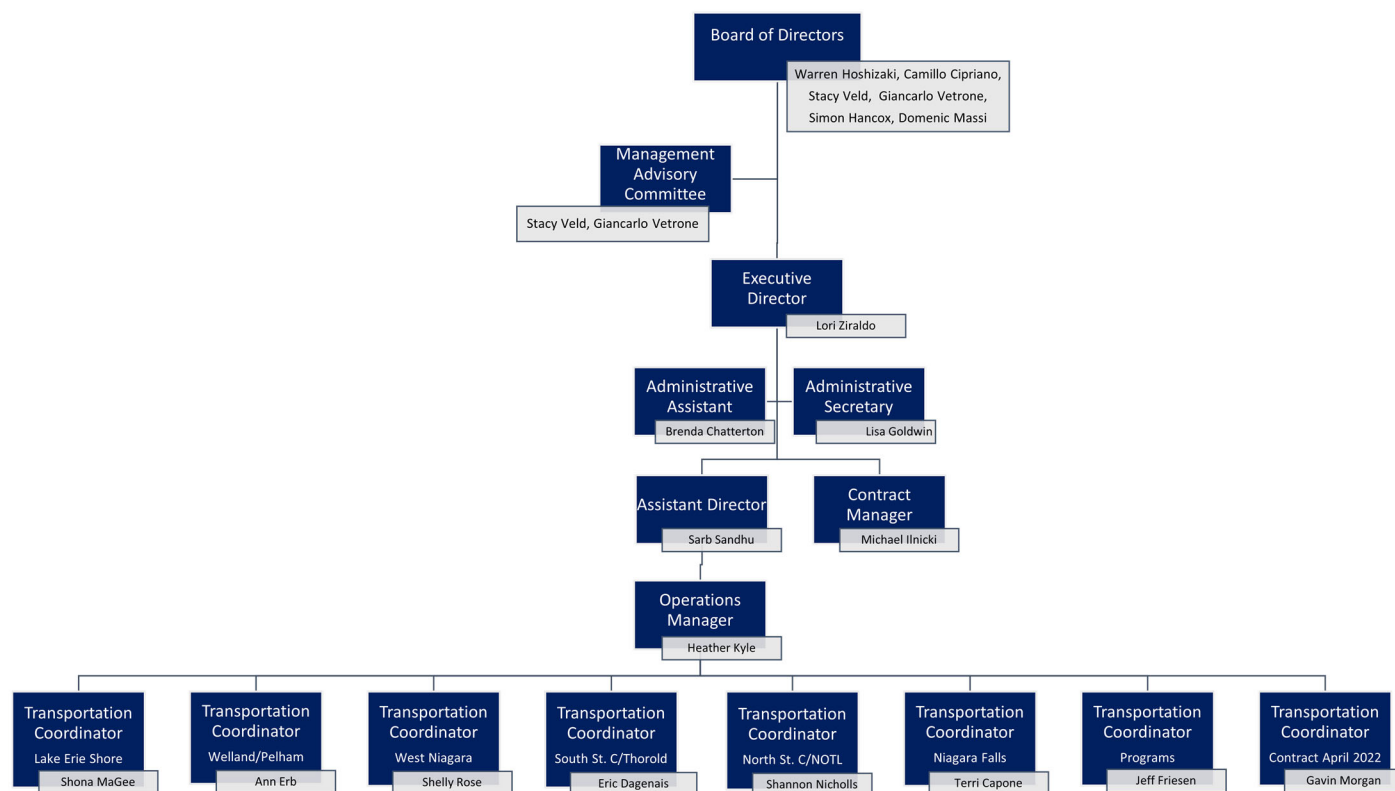


## ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW CONTINUED

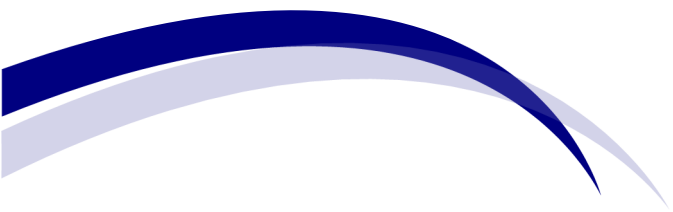
### Organizational Structure

The Board of Directors has three representatives appointed from each member school board for a total of six (6) Directors and the 2021-22 Directors are listed on Page 3. The Management Advisory Committee is comprised on the Superintendent of Business from each school boards.

There are fourteen (14) staff positions at NSTS. The Executive Director reports to the Board of Directors through the Management Advisory Committee and serves as the Secretary to the Board. All staff report to the Executive Director and the chart below shows the 2021-22 positions and staff:



The contract Transportation Coordinator position is supporting increased volume of work of the operational team due to additional COVID-19 protocols. The position is currently set to end in April 2022, with the intention to extend until December 2022, pending review with the Management Advisory Committee.

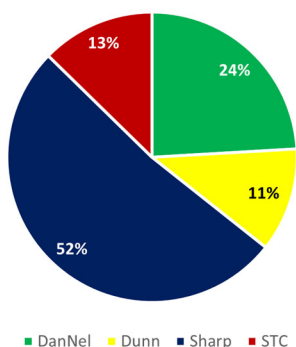


## ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW CONTINUED

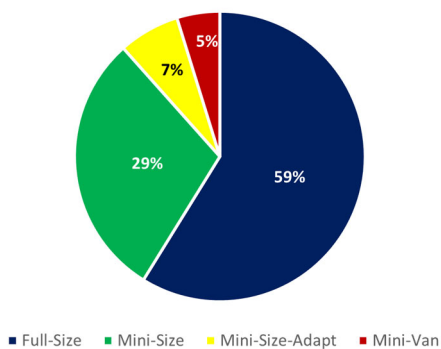
### Service Providers

NSTS holds the contracts directly with the service providers on behalf of member school boards. Contracts on 70% of bus routes are stable until August 2024 and on 30% of bus routes until August 2030. In the 2021-22 school year, there are 565 school bus routes.

Bus Route Share by Operator



Bus Routes by Size of Vehicle



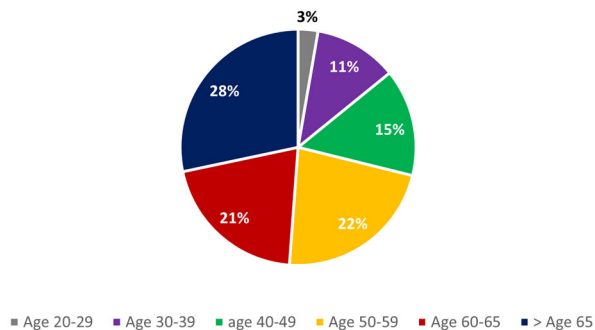
### Driver Demographic & Years of Services

Since the 2019-20 school year, both the implementation of competitive procurement results on 30% of routes and COVID-19 has impacted the driver demographic and years of service. This change will influence future driver recruitment and retention strategies.

	2019-20	2021-22
Age 20–29	2%	3%
Age 30-39	10%	11%
Age 40-49	14%	15%
Age 50-59	24%	22%
Age 60-65	21%	21%
>Age 65	30%	28%
Average Years Driving	5.75	4.73
< 2 years	29%	38%
≥ 10 years	15%	13%

Lost 642 years of driving experience in two years.

2021-22 Driver Demographic





## ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW CONTINUED

### Consortium Driver Investment

It is important to consider the effectiveness of the driver recruitment and retention programs implemented over the last few years, the impact new/ongoing COVID-19 protocols and future pressures on student transportation to make the appropriate investments.

- Continue school parking program, School Bus Love newsletter, annual professional development event held by NSTS and other consortium initiatives that communicates value of drivers and monitors that reinforces that the school bus is an extension of the classroom.
- Support service providers' financial investment in enhanced recruitment and retention efforts, beyond technical and financial proposals in competitive procurement, with COVID-19 funding not directed to disinfecting reimbursements. Enhancement expenditures may include additional P.R.I.D.E. driver trainers, training on Saturdays incurring overtime costs and implementing a sitting spare driver payment strategy for income certainty for spare drivers to retain these critical staff positions.
- Demographic of drivers continue to include retirees from full-time work and young parents. Ongoing consideration needs to be given to the impact of minimum wage increases, daycare changes, route changes and option for casual school custodian until field trip work increases on driver recruitment and retention programs.



### INCLEMENT WEATHER CANCELLATIONS

	Schools	Transportation
2010-11	1	1
2011-12	0	0
2012-13	1	1
2013-14	0	3
2014-15	1	2
2015-16	0	2
2016-17	0	0
2017-18	1	1
2018-19	3	9
2019-20	0	1
2020-21	1	1



## ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW CONTINUED

### Technology Deployed

- Georef's BusPlanner suite of products is deployed for planning and managing student transportation, including secure web portals and Software as a Service (SaaS) hosting and technical support.
- All school buses are equipped with GPS (Zonar, Synovia).
- Twenty-five (25%) of vehicles are equipped with internal-facing and external-facing cameras (Gatekeeper).

### Administrative Support

- Both school boards provide financial services and procurement support, and other fee for service support, under SLA. Specific to DSBN SLA also includes human resources, payroll and benefit administration and IT services and Niagara Catholic's SLA includes office lease, custodial services and phone service.
- DSBN Casual List, Kelly Services and/or AnswerPlus provide support during back-to-school or other times of staff resource constraint.
- Insurance is purchased through OSBIE.

### Community Partners

- Niagara Region Public Health is the primary partner for Active School Travel (AST) programs, and the AST network includes all twelve (12) municipalities, Niagara's crossing guard committee, Safety Village, Heart Niagara and Niagara Regional Police Services.
- Niagara Regional Police Services is the primary partner in the external-facing video camera program.
- NSTS is a member of Niagara's geospatial group with reciprocal data sharing for local GIS-related data.
- Intertrain provides school bus student safety training in schools featuring Buster the Bus for Kindergarten to Grade 3 and Grades 4 to 8, including videos that are available on the NSTS website. These contracted services are through OECM, and in addition Intertrain has developed videos that are available on the NSTS website to support the First Ride program featuring Buzzy the Bee and pedestrian safety program featuring Blue the Butterfly.



## **2021-22 PRIORITIES**

### **2021-22 Key Objectives:**

The 2021-22 school year is a pivotal year in the evolution of the Consortium as NSTS prepares for its 15th year anniversary and the need to settle in changes resulting from staff changes, capacity pressures due to increased students eligible for transportation and COVID-19.

Key objectives include:

1. Driver recruitment and retention to alleviate service impacts from route and spare driver shortages;
2. Set clear roles, responsibilities and expectations for staff, and provide the appropriate supports, for ongoing organization effectiveness;
3. Align resources and processes to support staff, school and family communication to effectively respond to increased students eligible for transportation due to growth, alleviate capacity pressures on buses and to respond to driver and vehicle concerns.

### **Immediate and Ongoing Priorities:**

- Monitor route driver and spare driver staffing levels, take action to collapse or re-assign routes as required to support on-time service performance and continue implementation of immunization disclosure policy.
- Complete Ministry of Education simulation, due December 17, for funding decisions impacting the 2022-23 school year and monitor ongoing communications to further inform local policy and operational decisions.
- Facilitate successful transition of new Executive Director and recruit and onboard new Assistant Director.
- Finalize and communicate clear roles and responsibilities for staff and develop transition plans for seamless transition of staff new to their positions.



## 2021-22 PRIORITIES CONTINUED

(N) is New Priority specific to the 2021-22 school year

(A) is an Annual Priority

### January to March Priorities:

- (A) Commence planning for 2022-23 school year focused on capacity planning for increasing enrolment and transportation eligibility, and forecast new vehicles and drivers by March 31 to service providers.
- (A) While planning for the 2022-23 school year, determine if bell time efficiencies can offset new vehicle and driver requirements, to reduce strain on limited resources and engage the Management Advisory Committee in 2022-23 plans and preliminary budget.
- (A) Reconcile year-to-date fuel escalation contractual requirement and funding provision.
- (A) Engage staff in annual appraisal and development plan process.
- (A/N) Project impact of CPI increase for equivalent contractual terms increase and Ontario minimum wage potential impact on driver recruitment and retention to engage Management Advisory Committee in planning for 2022-23 financial and contractual decisions.
- (A/N) Plan Active School Travel (AST) Spring in to Spring campaign and fulfill commitment to the Ontario Active School Travel (OAST) fund for pedestrian safety training.
- (N) Recruit and onboard new Assistant Director.
- (N) Align staff areas to alleviate capacity pressures of growth areas on specific Area Transportation Coordinators.
- (N) Decide if post-COVID-19, if Opt-In process for those eligible for transportation will remain in place or return to Opt-In only for Kindergarten students and Opt-Out for all other students.
- (N) Develop communications plan to more effectively communicate with schools and families for back-to-school for the 2022-23 school year.
- (N) Update and align documentation for governance and staff to reflect current practices of the Consortium, including Consortium Agreement and consortium procedures.

## 2021-22 PRIORITIES CONTINUED

### April to June Priorities:

- (A) Complete March 31 year-end financial process and project total expenditures to financial year-end August 31, 2022 to report to Management Advisory Committee.
- (A) Complete consultation for 2022-23 bell time changes and finalize budget submission to each school board.
- (A) Hold 2022-23 planning meetings with planning departments on enrolment projections and special education consultants of both school boards to validate planning assumptions.
- (A/N) Execute Active School Travel (AST) Spring in to Spring campaign and fulfill commitment to the Ontario Active School Travel (OAST) fund for pedestrian safety training.
- (A/N) Plan following school year Consortium driver engagement activities with newsletters, PD Event and additional learnings to support recruitment and retention.
- (A/N) Review school board process and timelines for new school year pre-registration and registration process and align resources accordingly.
- (A/N) Monitor Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding for student transportation to determine how new formula impacts local school boards and present to Management Advisory Committee.
- (N) Redesign processes and communication tools to schools and families to reduce demands on staff during back to school.
- (N) Develop school secretary and administrator training program, and establish training and/or meeting attendance, to ensure schools are prepared first line of communication with families.
- (N) Review alternate programs and sites with Management Advisory Committee for future student transportation delivery options including aligning resources and budget.
- (N) Review leading practices for hazard designation procedures, adopt and apply leading practices to all schools to reset eligibility by hazard designation.

## 2021-22 PRIORITIES CONTINUED

### July to December Year-End Priorities:

- (A) Reconcile year-to-date fuel escalation contractual requirement and funding provision.
- (A) Complete documentation on contract compliance and performance management, and key performance and achievement reporting, to prepare for Annual Report once financials are complete.
- (A) Reconcile other grant expenditures for reporting to school boards, including student rider safety programs.
- (A) Negotiate any new or relevant contract addendum for service providers related to COVID-19 or new/change expectations for the new school year.
- (A) Complete August 31 year-end financials.
- (A) Prepare and complete 2021-22 year-end financial audit, aim for week prior to or after Thanksgiving to have draft financial statements to school boards by October 31.
- (A) Complete 2021-22 Annual Report for Annual General Meeting.
- (A) Complete 2021-22 Ministry Survey for Student Transportation

## ACTIVE SCHOOL TRAVEL

The goal of Active School Travel is to reduce barriers, whether real or perceived, to students walking or wheeling to and from school.

This is achieved by working with school board, municipal and community partners for better infrastructure and enhancing student skills through education and walk to school events to practice these skills.

The result is reduced traffic congestion and improved safety in school zones and improving student health and well-being by using active school travel to and from school.



## 2021-22 PRIORITIES CONTINUED

### Advancing Active School Travel

In 2018, NSTS and our partner in Active School Travel, Niagara Region Public Health, received a \$100K grant over two-years from Green Communities Canada through Ontario Active School Travel.

This grant:

- Supported 26 elementary schools participate in safe and active walking and wheeling programs.
- Participated in walk to school events, focused on feature events in Walktober and Spring into Spring.
- Built school support team for Active School Travel between NSTS Transportation Coordinators and the School Nurses.
- Piloted a Walking School Bus Program led by school bus drivers focused on pedestrian training and school community awareness.
- Work with school boards to manufacture, distribute and install 25 bicycle racks at elementary schools.
- Funded the development of a video by Heart Niagara to provide cycling skills consistent with Bike Rodeo training provided in schools.
- Developed Blue the Butterfly character and pedestrian safety video to support Kindergarten to Grade 3 skills for safe and active school travel. This was the catalyst for the development of an accompanying toolkit for in-school student training.
- Provided funds and in kind support to the City of Niagara Falls and Town of Fort Erie to develop an in school program delivered by crossing guards.

## CAST OF SAFETY CHARACTERS

### **BUZZY THE BEE**

Teaches the First Ride Program to Kindergarten students and their families.

### **BUSTER THE BUS**

Teaches Kindergarten to Grade 3 students school bus safety and behaviour expectations.

### **BLUE THE BUTTERFLY**

Teaches Kindergarten to Grade 3 students pedestrian safety skills.



## 2021-22 PRIORITIES CONTINUED

### Advancing Student Safety Programs

#### Current Programs:

- Intertrain in school school bus safety and student behaviour expectation training with two age appropriate presentations for Kindergarten to Grade 3 and Grades 4 to 8.
- Online videos for First Ride for new Kindergarten students to the bus, and school bus safety for Grades 1 to 3 and Grades 4 to 8.
- Online video for Kindergarten to Grade 3 pedestrian safety training, and pilot project for in person training in Niagara Falls and Fort Erie.
- Grade 2 Safety Village transportation provided for curriculum delivered by police officer for school bus safety, pedestrian safety and cycling safety.

#### Opportunity to Improve Programs:

- First Ride program was delivered the weekend before Labour Day at the Pen Centre prior to virtual online program during COVID-19. Opportunity to expand so that each bus company holds a First Ride event, one in St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, Welland, Fort Erie and Grimsby/Lincoln in addition to being available for schools to book in the Spring.
- Evacuation training is available for schools to book to be delivered by bus company. Opportunity to add practice evacuation to Intertrain's presentation and engage bus drivers in training.
- Pedestrian Safety training in school pilot program offered in Niagara Falls and Fort Erie has the potential to be expanded to all municipalities and delivered by crossing guard and/or a condensed version provided by NSTS to school teachers or senior students for train the trainer.



## 2022-23 & BEYOND PRIORITIES

### July to September Priorities:

- (A) Open portal to service providers, obtain trial run feedback to update routes, monitor frequently driver and monitor status to cover routes with spares to cover absence and monito vehicle assignments to ensure requested vehicle available for each route,
- (A) Update website as appropriate, communications to parents for preliminary transportation arrangements, open secure web portals and prepare school communication for their return.
- (A) Commit mode of delivery and details to deliver First Ride programs at the end of August for back to school.
- (A) Plan International Walk to School, Walktober, activities with community partner for promotion at schools.
- (N) Ontario-wide implementation of amber lights as the inner-lights on the eight-lamp warning system on all school buses, including communication to stakeholders and Niagara motorists of changes effective September 1, 2022.
- (N) Monitor Niagara Catholic phone system procurement for implementation timelines for the Consortium and facilitate training for staff.

### October to December Priorities:

- (A) Reconcile and prepare 2022-23 revised budget estimates for both school boards.
- (A) Execute International Walk to School activities with community partners and schools.
- (A/N) Commence planning for the 2023-24 school year, including final year of contract activities on 70% of routes to plan for procurement of contracts expiring August 2024. Consider extending contracts to not enter final year of contract for stability for drivers and planning. Consider cost pressures, new technology, new procedures to inform contract terms and conditions.
- (N) Policy review to respond to new Ministry of Education student transportation funding formula and policy standardization, or commit to existing policies and find offsetting efficiencies if deficit to funding.

## 2022-23 & BEYOND PRIORITIES CONTINUED

**Note:** *Reference 2021-22 Priorities for key annual timelines and set remaining 2023-24 priorities based on contract, policy decisions and learnings from back to school.*

### 2023-24 Priorities:

- Implement new policy or offsetting efficiencies to new funding formula.
- If no contract extension in place, release competitive procurement for 70% of routes by November to award in February at latest to implement in September 2024.
- Plan for implementation of competitive procurement, specifically in terms of any enhanced technology or policy change provisions.

### Technology Considerations:

- Parent delay notification via text message or Where's My Bus App.
- Mobile tablet on bus for driver route by route direction and ridership attendance tracking.
- Video camera program expansion and greater level of automation.
- Electric and alternate fuel source school buses.

### Staffing Considerations:

- Prepare for staff retirements with specific attention to updating all standard operating procedure documentation for new staff training.
- Implement secondment agreements for clear employment terms and conditions of consortium staff employed by DSBN.
- Consider University of Guelph Pupil Transportation Certificate course and School Board Administration Diploma programs for staff development and succession planning
- Continued OASBO Transportation Committee membership and active participation, specifically engagement in Leading Practice Sub-Committee adds tremendous value.

# NSTS.ca

# Happy Holidays



## NIAGARA STUDENT TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

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