



# COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan

## Update: March 2022

The Toronto District School Board's [COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan](#) is a three phase plan that identifies which groups have been most impacted, where interventions will be put in place, and initial outcomes that result from these interventions.

The first report in a series of reports over the next two years (reporting back twice per school year) was completed in June 2021. This report, *Pandemic Recovery Plan Update: March 2022*, is the first report back to the Planning and Priorities Committee. The next update will be shared in Spring 2022.

The COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan addressed areas of focus for the 2021-22 school year and where targeted interventions were planned. This *Pandemic Recovery Plan Update: March 2022* is organized into the same sections:

- Building Relationships and Enhancing Belonging
- Use of Play/Outdoor Play
- Honouring Skills/Knowledge Gained During the Pandemic
- Assessment for Learning/As Learning
- Differentiated Supports for Those Who Have Had Greater Impacts from the Pandemic
- Staff Collaboration
- Digital Tools for Engaging Students/Families
- Virtual Learning 2021-2022

### **Student Outcome Data Spring and Fall 2021**

The outcome data tells a consistent story from that included in the COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan (June 2021). The proportion of elementary students reaching level 3 in all subjects has stayed consistent to the proportion of students meeting this level before the pandemic began (Figure 1 below).

At secondary school, similar to analysis from June, credit course averages for Grade 9 and 10 students rose significantly at the outset of the pandemic and generally stayed up when looking at averages that included all students (Figure 2). However, when disaggregating this data by demographics and achievement, students who were already performing well, 70% and above, went up at the outset of the pandemic and stayed at the higher percentage levels (Figure 3). Students who were not achieving at high levels, 59% and below (Figure 4) also went up, but then returned to the level of performance that they were achieving before the pandemic began. These outcomes suggest that higher performing students coped more effectively in relation to school success during the pandemic than lower performing students regardless of demographic circumstances.

Figure 1. Percent of Elementary Students At *Level 3 and above* on Report Cards

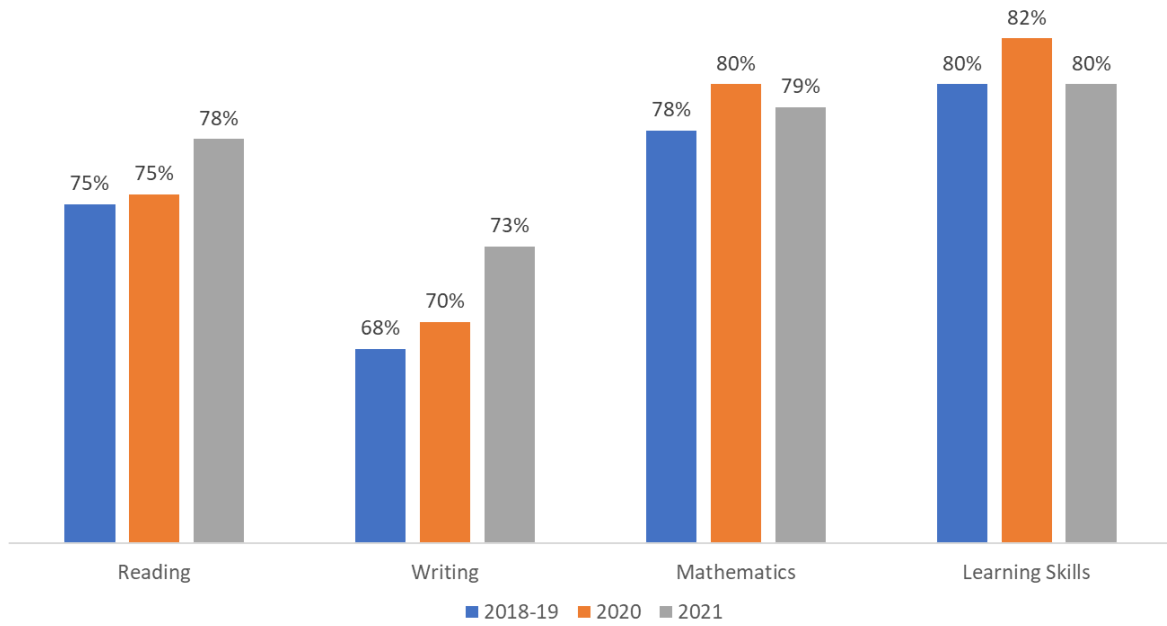


Figure 2. Average Marks of Grade 9-10 Student Cohort (N=15,943) for 2018-19 to 2020-21 Semester Courses

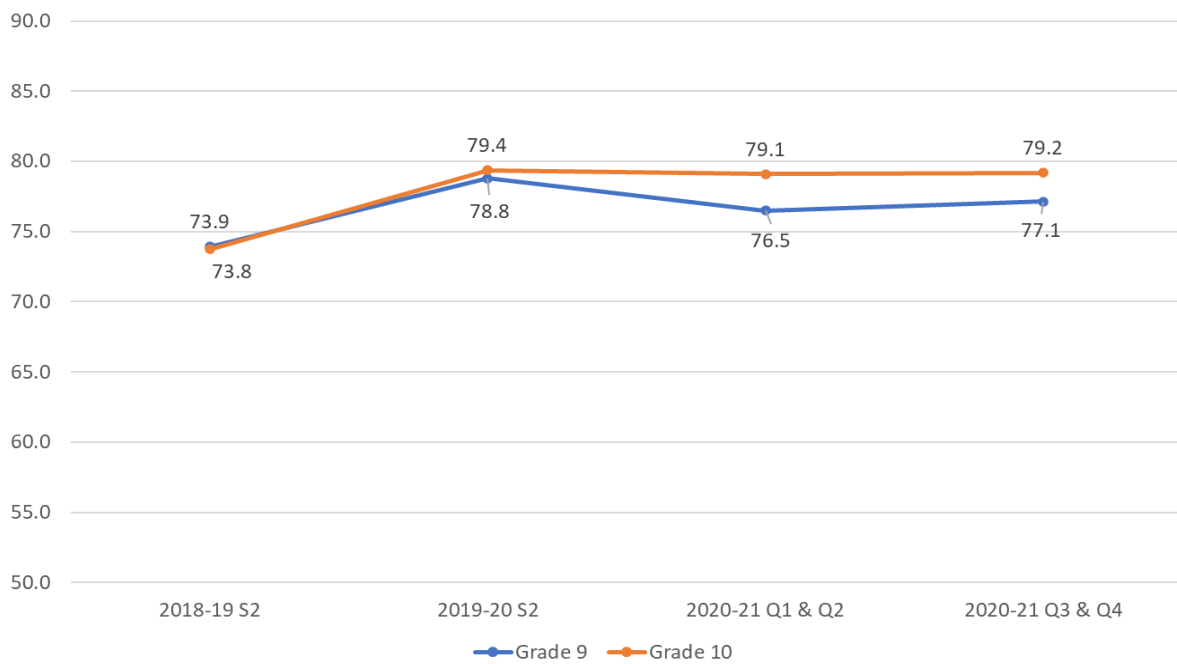


Figure 3. Cohort Course Averages of 80-100 for Semestered Courses in 2018-19 to 2020-21

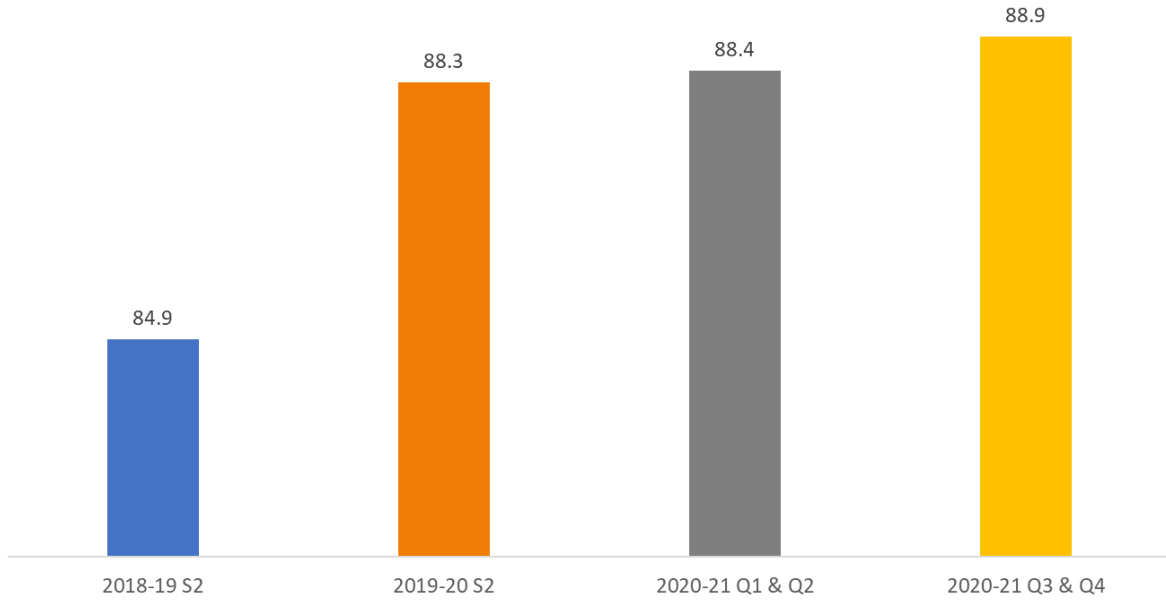


Figure 4. Cohort Course Averages of 0-49 for Semestered Courses in 2018-19 to 2020-21

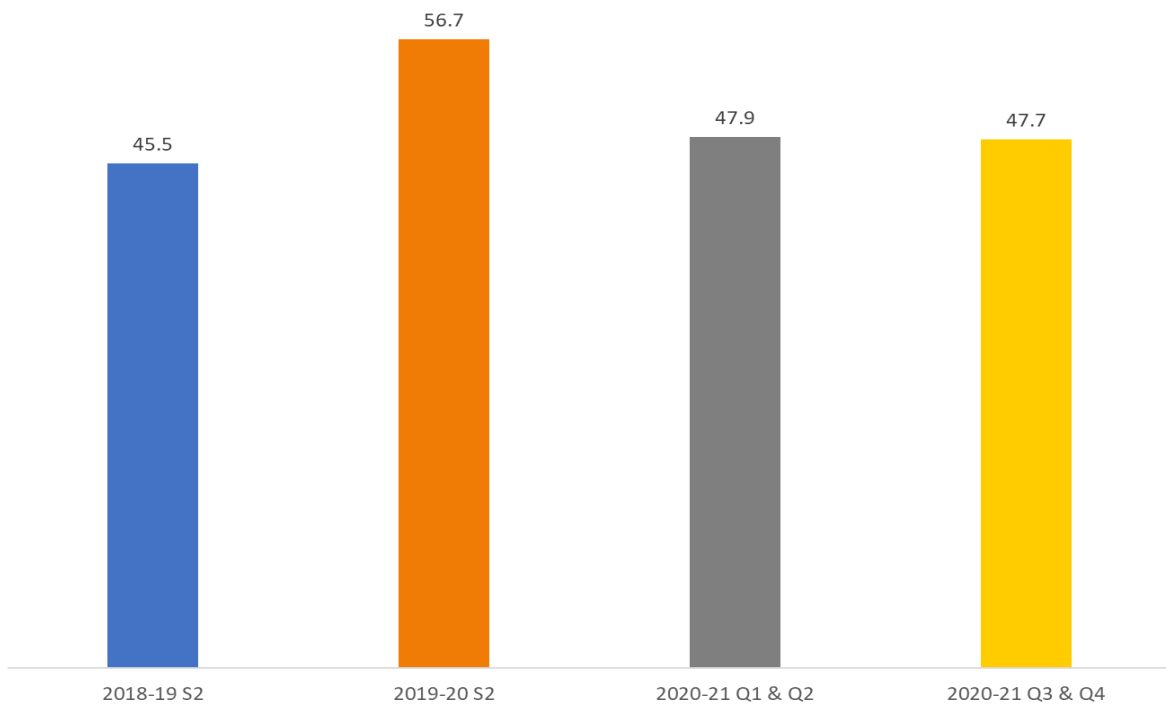
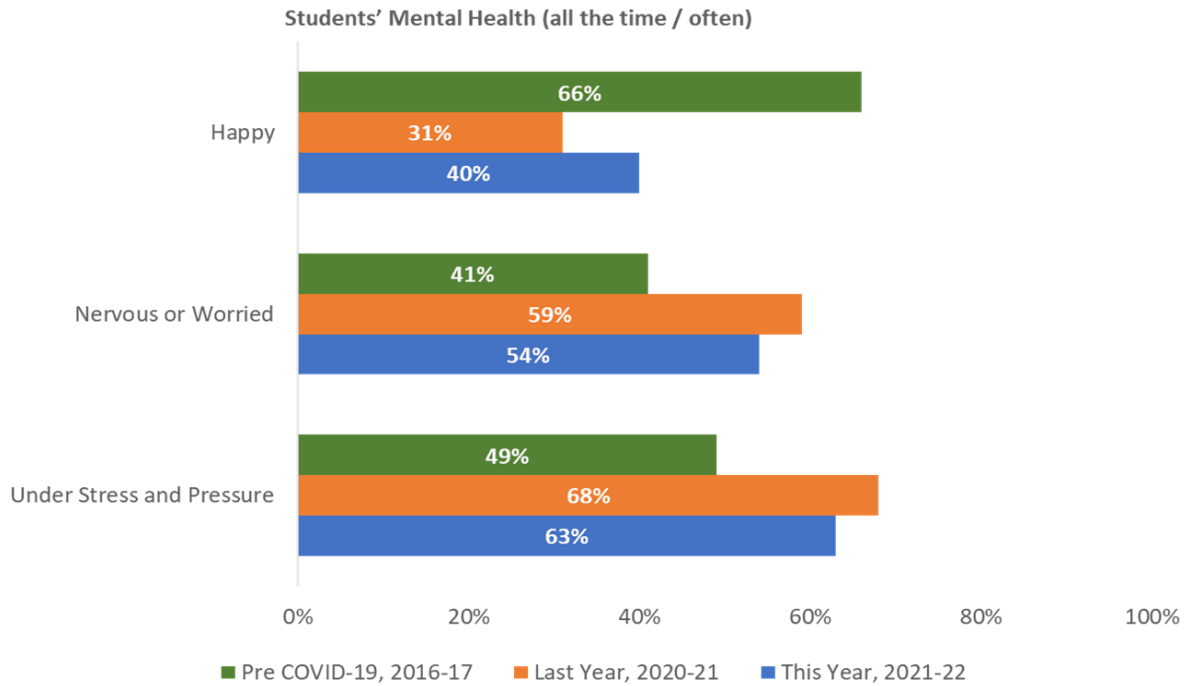


Figure 5. Student Reported Mental Health Before and Throughout Pandemic



Some of the most significant data that emerged through TDSB’s ongoing check in surveys with large proportions of middle and secondary school students was the decline in the percentages of students reporting frequent happiness, while the percentage of students reporting feeling pressure, worry, and nervousness frequently increased (Figure 5). When school began in September, as a predominantly in-person learning experience, these proportions shifted towards pre-pandemic proportions. While not close to percentages before the pandemic hit amongst students, the shifts away from lower reported levels of mental health is encouraging. In addition, percentages of students reporting their ability to connect with peers, complete their school work, and get support from teachers is comparably high, approximately 90% affirming these conditions regularly occur in their schooling experience, with students attending school in-person reporting higher levels of peer connectedness and students attending school virtually reporting higher levels of work completion.



## Building Relationships and Enhancing Belonging

*“Following what has been a challenging period of time for many, it is important to begin building new relationships and to focus on rebuilding and strengthening existing relationships within the school community that may have changed over the course of the pandemic. This includes all relationships: student/student, student/staff, staff/staff, and schools/families/communities.”* (Pandemic Recovery Plan, June 2021)

### Centering Work Around Student Joy

When school opened in September 2021, it was important to bring students back into positive learning experiences. We focused on belonging, relationships and seeing students as competent and capable. We centred our work on building responsive relationships with students, families and educators, which are critical to social emotional well-being and academic success.

As we progress through the pandemic, the importance of helping educators and students to find joy in everyday learning has become clear. Listening, observing and responding to student interests, strengths and curiosities provide students with voice, choice and agency which leads to shared joyful learning opportunities. It has been critical as part of professional learning to focus on conditions that support opportunities for joy. Educators have started to engage in inquiry conversations that provide evidence of learning for the following questions:

- How might we create rich learning opportunities through exploration, play and inquiry that honours student voice and amplifies the joy, excellence and genius that exists within each student?
- How might we leverage digital tools to capture students’ joy, excellence and genius and to make their thinking and learning visible?

**By centering joy in professional learning, in assessment and in teaching and learning practices, social emotional well-being becomes part of pedagogy and not a separate entity.** Conditions to support social emotional well-being are infused in curriculum, instruction and assessment so that joy is at the centre of our work.

Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and practices allow student voice and choice to drive instruction. **Centering student voice and identity in all curriculum areas is essential for creating conditions that foster well-being and belonging.** Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy helps educators to teach in ways that foster mutual empowerment, confidence and reliance (Muhammad, 2020). Culturally relevant and responsive practices are responsive to real-world issues and lived realities for both practitioners and students. Educators build relationships through culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and practices so that students feel a sense of belonging, and connection to one another, the educator and community, and ultimately, joy as a learner and knowledge-creator.

*“Fostering good relationships with students and their families is the single most important priority for educators. Families develop trust, confidence and a sense of belonging in programs that value the centrality of the family to the health and well-being of students. In high-quality programs, the aim is to strive to establish and maintain reciprocal relationships among educators and families to and to view families as important contributors with unique knowledge, experiences and strengths.” (adapted from “Building on How Does Learning Happen, 2020, updated June 1, 2021)*

### **Social and Emotional Well-Being**

Establishing mentally healthy and culturally relevant school spaces is central, as this enhances social emotional well being and feelings of mattering and belonging through relationship building. Understanding mental health and wellness through a lens of equity facilitates the co-creation of mentally healthy school spaces with students. These building blocks include daily culturally responsive mental health activities within classrooms that represent, include and support student identities. Co-creating mentally healthy school spaces with students recognizes, acknowledges and honours students’ voices, strengths, learnings and growth prior to and throughout the pandemic (i.e. navigational assets such as their voices, resilience skills, learnings, thoughts, ideas and lived experiences; linguistic assets such as honouring, including, accepting students’ unique assets, cultures and histories; familial, aspirational and resistance assets). (Yosso, T. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 8, 69-91. doi:10.1080/1361332052000341006).

**A climate of positive mental health and well being includes recognizing and nurturing the brilliance, self-love, and resistance of students, families and communities.** This includes centring relationships and trust-building with students and families, from an asset lens, which realizes student agency. Prioritizing, supporting and strengthening mental health and wellness has been ongoing since last school year. Professional Support Services (PSS) department staff (e.g. Social Work, Child and Youth Services, Occupational/Physical Therapists, Speech-Language Pathologists and Psychology) continue to provide culturally responsive supports and resources to students, staff, caregivers and parents by centering student/parent/caregivers identities, voice and lived experiences.

Multidisciplinary initiatives have included PSS departments in co-leadership with TDSB departments such as Equity, the Urban Indigenous Education Centre and the Centre for Excellence for Black Student Achievement to support and affirm student needs, voice and identities for the creation of mental health and well being activities and initiatives. PSS staff have been building mental wellness capacities within school communities, through a lens of equity, in particular, anti-Black racism and anti-Indigenous racism, through differential PSS supports, student group activities on wellness and mental health and staff professional development.

Relationship and community building continue to be centred to strengthen social emotional well being and mental health. These resources and initiatives continue to include the voices of students, parents/caregivers and staff ensuring identities and lived experiences are centered. Mental health and well being resources and activities



are accessible to virtual and in-person students, parents/caregivers and staff. The focus for social emotional learning continues to be to strengthen, connect, honour student learnings and enhance positive student/student and student/school socialization, all of which are building blocks to mentally healthy school spaces.

Learn more: [Mental Health and Well Being Initiatives 2021-22](#), [Future Mental Health and Well Being Initiatives](#) and [Professional Support Services Differential Responses](#).

## Use of Play/Outdoor Play

### Building Equity Through Play

Like every human activity, play is affected by cultural context. Students at play reproduce and also recreate the specificities of their cultural environment (Gosso, 2013). Educators hold their own preconceived notions of what play is and how to interpret play based on their own positionalities (Kinkead-Clark and Hardacre, 2016).

When educators include the voices of students and their families, they create a space for children to shape their own identities as learners. By utilizing families' cultural knowledge to construct play, equitable play environments emerge that will hopefully eliminate racialized play (Israel, 2020).

Play is also used as a tool to learn and talk about race, gender, class, ability, and other identities with children as well as teaching children about racial privilege and oppression (Escayg, 2017). Using play to build an anti-racist or anti-oppression classroom does call for educators to critically assess play-based learning and how activities, materials, and interactions may reinforce monolithic understandings of students and marginalize non-Eurocentric forms of play (Escayg et al., 2017).

Educators will be involved in continuous work around building equity through play and the responsive, intentional decision making required in creating conditions for such learning to occur.

**Play is fundamental to student growth and development, both socially and academically and is central to student learning.** Play is intrinsically motivated, freely chosen, personally directed and essential for development, mental health and well being and academic competence for all students. Recognizing the value of play during the pandemic, educators continue to incorporate play based learning in all areas of the curriculum, across all grades and play based opportunities is central to educator professional learning.

*"In play there is a liberation, a liberation to be, to set free, to experience the moment with joy. It felt positive and joyous. It was inclusive and all participated, it built community." (TDSB Educator)*

This school year, educators have been identifying the joy in learning through play both in indoor and outdoor learning environments and are beginning to intentionally create conditions that promote such opportunities. An emphasis on leveraging digital tools to capture moments of joy in play, and using play based learning as the focus of assessment to support educators in understanding the reciprocal relationship between assessment and instruction, continues to be explored.



With the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic this past year, play opportunities are vital to helping students make sense of their experiences, problem-solve, reconnect with their peers, and promote their own well-being (Focus on Play, June 2020). In addition to developing a variety of cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills, play is important for the mental wellbeing of students at all ages. “As our world is constantly changing, play is significant for children to have a joyful channel to reduce their anxiety that comes with change” – such as COVID-19 and learning in a pandemic (Play Wales 2020, p.4).

Over 12,000 students from 200+ elementary schools have engaged in outdoor programming through Toronto Outdoor Education Schools and educators have been supported in using various tools (nature journals, flig grids) to embrace outdoor learning. Digital documentation as well as social media have been incorporated into the teaching and learning process so that joy continues to be shared and captured to build capacity in learning spaces across the system.

*“I believe that deeper learning takes place on the land in which we occupy. It is important to get to know one's surroundings to deepen awareness of the natural environment and strengthen this connection. I hope to gain more confidence in taking my students outdoors for critical learning experiences. I hope to develop trust in myself and trust in my students for taking the learning respectfully outdoors.” (TDSB Educator)*

*“Learning happens everywhere, not only within the classroom environment. What I hope to gain from this experience is to be able to build community relationships and provide students with the opportunity to take their learning outdoors. I remember having such valuable experiences and learning when I did outdoor learning programs in middle school...” (TDSB Educator)*

*“I think outdoor learning is very relaxing and peaceful and good for your mental health and sometimes people learn better when they are outside.” (TDSB Student Grade 6)*

*“Outdoors I understand what the teachers are teaching us a little better because it's more interactive outside. I feel happier outside than inside because I feel free. Indoors I feel like I am forced and inside of a jail. And can sometimes feel depressing.” (TDSB Student Grade 6/7)*

### **Play in the Later Years**

Play has mainly been associated with early years education (Ortlieb, 2010). However, **educational researchers contend that play is not just for early childhood; it takes place in all classrooms. This includes classes in which students engage in discussions, group work, creative writing or critical thinking (Ortlieb, 2010). Play is not the exclusive domain of early childhood. It is dynamic and extends across development.**

A focus on mental health and well being during the pandemic has led to a reconsideration or reframing of the importance of play in secondary classrooms. Students need time to decompress, have fun, interact and create with their educators and peers. The need to focus on student happiness and to address worry and stress by including positive learning experiences may be key for frustrated students to re-engage.



*“Something I’m grateful for in this time of COVID and all the changes it’s brought to learning, is that it forced me to learn how important play is, no matter your age.”*  
(TDSB Educator)

*“Play in my classroom had the following impacts:*

- *It was often the only time my virtual students were willing to turn on their cameras or mics, but as they slowly did it for the games, they started to do it more during the “lesson”.*
- *It built community in the hybrid classroom- among the virtual students and between the virtual and in person students.*
- *It allowed me to get to know my students and build a way bigger rapport than I would have- you’d be surprised how much you can learn from a game of would you rather!*
- *It showed my students that learning how to take care of your mental health is a priority, and that it wasn’t just something I said was important, I modelled how important it was by giving it time.*
- *It made students more ready to learn- let’s be honest, two hours, four hours- at a certain point there’s only so much a brain can absorb. We need the breaks and the joy so we can continue to thrive.”* (TDSB Educator)

Experiential Learning opportunities such as Technological Education, Cooperative Education and community projects provide experiences for students to be active participants in the learning process, not merely an observer. This is an important part of play in the later years. The student thinks about and/or reflects upon the experience, both during the experience and after it, to make meaning from it and identify what has been learned. It is through a structured reflective process that students develop new skills, new attitudes, and new ways of thinking (Lewis & Williams, 1994). Finally, the student applies the learning by using the newly acquired knowledge and/or skills to inform current and future decisions and actions.

Throughout the pandemic, Cooperative Education virtual placements have become increasingly available and relevant; in-person placements are also available and crucial for many students, particularly those pursuing careers in skilled trades.

The secondary outdoor learning model provides support with engaging students in the outdoors and co-constructing lesson plans that can be brought outside. The work with hybrid coaches involves opportunities for community engagement and spread across the system with demonstration classrooms.

*“This week in GLS we took an unconventional approach to a high school class, instead of sitting at our desk and taking notes off of power points we applied skills like teamwork, organization, communication, leadership, and way more-what this class is supposed to be teaching - and applied it in fun exciting ways.”*  
(TDSB Secondary Educator)

### **Challenges and Next Steps**

The learning environment, including the materials and organization of space, is vital to creating opportunities that stimulate play. At times, operational procedures and

guidelines can limit such opportunities and the freedom that ignites play for students. This tension around health and safety and opportunities for play-based learning has created stress and anxiety for educators who understand the value of play but are limited by protocols that do not necessarily align with pedagogical approaches.

We will continue to provide educators with examples and showcase learning opportunities where play-based learning can continue, while also adhering to health and safety protocols. More importantly, taking learning outdoors fundamentally promotes the joy in learning and transforms learning experiences inherently through play while adhering to safety protocols. Support in refining play in their practice will continue to be provided to elementary and secondary educators.

### **Honouring Skills/Knowledge Gained During the Pandemic**

**It is important to acknowledge that students, families and educators have had a wide range of experiences during the pandemic.** We continue to focus on honouring the skills and knowledge gained during the pandemic and to bridge learning experiences gained in different learning environments. We are sharing initial insights into learning from the pandemic and steps being taken to honour learning and to consider implications to practices both in the classroom and in schools.

**Building trusting relationships has been at the forefront during the return to school.** As educators get to know their students and communities, they are better able to co-construct quality learning experiences that reflect an asset-based view of the student, the family and the educator. Some key learning developed through the pandemic that has carried over include engaging students, parents and caregivers and educators, enhancing instructional practices and new ways we do our work.

### **Virtual Engagement of Students, Parents/Caregivers, Educators**

We have begun to use multiple, creative ways to engage students, parents/caregivers and educators using virtual tools. Students have access to areas of interest, learning opportunities and opportunities for student voice using virtual tools. Some examples of virtual student engagement include: extracurricular activities, mental health workshops, student voice opportunities (CEBSA), guest speakers, virtual field trips, STEM Equity Conference and TDSB Creates. Students have been able to participate in unique learning experiences where they could showcase their capabilities undeterred by the challenge of time, expense and travel.

For some parents and families, using virtual tools has removed barriers to access and participate in school life. Some examples include virtual parent teacher interviews, School Support Team and IPRC meetings, School Advisory Council, various workshops and the Parents as Partners Conference.

Educators are using virtual tools to engage students and parents/caregivers ( e.g. Bright Space, Google Classroom, virtual parent teacher conferences), to collaborate with colleagues and to build learning communities to support enhanced learning opportunities. Another example of educators engaging with families to support learning is the ESL/LEAP department implementing virtual LEAP reviews, which allows for flexibility and consistent collaboration as various stakeholders were able to join from across the system.

## **Enhancing Professional Learning Opportunities**

Moving to Virtual Learning as a system provided expanded learning opportunities for staff in a variety of roles. Professional learning was easier to establish, promote and present without financial considerations (e.g. venue coordination and travel). Access to virtual resources and professional learning communities has allowed educators to access learning and develop enhanced instructional practices to support student learning. Some examples of the professional learning needs identified and addressed included: increased system capacity supporting digital tools and resources, information literacy skills and Library Learning Resources professional learning and support for resource selection, acquisition, ethical and legal use of resources/information including Copyright/Fair Dealing.

## **Working in New Ways**

While it is sometimes important to gather in person to learn and team build, the use of virtual meetings allows for time efficiencies and the opportunity to bring diverse voices and perspectives to the table by eliminating barriers in access. For example, School Administrators can now attend IPRC and LN meetings and participate on committees without leaving their schools.

## **Assessment for Learning/As Learning**

Educators recognize the exceptional circumstances created by the pandemic and its impact on learning, and have responded with flexibility, compassion and understanding to the unique needs and situations of students and their parents/caregivers/guardians.

Assessment “for” and “as” learning are key practices that support student learning and inform educators as they plan next steps and consider their choices of resources. Equity and anti-oppression are at the core of all conversations connected to these key practices. When students are active, engaged, and critical assessors of their learning, they make sense of new information, relate it to their prior knowledge, and use it in new ways to deepen their understanding of the world. Individual Education Plans (IEPs), are also used as tools to inform assessment and evaluation practices that are culturally relevant to students with accommodation and/or modifications.

## **Rethinking Assessment Practices**

The COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery Plan highlighted a need to expand educator capacity on utilizing assessment “as” and “for” learning in weaving existing learning with new learning experiences. Educators have been focusing on big ideas and essential learnings which lead to deeper understandings of the world.

**We know that knowledge of facts and information is important, and that understanding is more important. Understanding is the ability to understand the “whys” and “hows” as students transfer their knowledge to new and different situations.** Assessments need to be open-ended, connected to the community and the world allowing students to show how they “make sense” of their knowledge and explain the “whys” and “hows” as they apply their knowledge in new and different situations.

In both virtual and in-person learning environments, the focus has begun to shift from product to process, as educators use a greater number and variety of rich, authentic, real-world assessments where students can demonstrate and apply their learning. In many secondary school courses, the summatives, worth 30%, were made up of final exams. The move to virtual learning has acted as an impetus for educators to consider alternatives to exams on how students can demonstrate their knowledge, and their understanding by moving away from non-traditional assessment practices. This school year we have moved away from final exams to course summative tasks/culminating activities worth between 10% and 30%.

### **Enhancing Assessment Practices**

A focus on professional learning in the areas of pedagogical documentation, the purposeful use of digital tools and inquiry-based assessments has supported educators as they rethink assessment practices. **Educators are being asked to reflect upon the following question:**

***“Why this learning, for this student, at this time?”***

The perspective and engagement of parents/caregivers/guardians in their child’s learning has increased educators’ capacity to respond by providing instructional next steps while simultaneously encouraging voice, choice and active involvement throughout the assessment process.

Through ongoing professional learning sessions, educators are:

- Exploring how they can create rich learning opportunities through exploration, play and inquiry
- Reflecting on how they can be responsive to students and create learning environments that honour student voice and amplify the joy, excellence and genius in children
- Using inquiry stance to document students’ thinking and learning using iPads
- Deepening understanding around the pedagogical documentation process
- Exploring how they can make thinking and learning visible for parents/caregivers/guardians and engage them in the learning process
- Exploring the purposeful use of digital tools to document student learning, provide feedback to students and parents/caregivers and gather important information and observations which inform lesson planning and selection of resources and instructional strategies.
- Reflecting on how to accommodate and/or modify assessment practises that are appropriate to the strengths and areas of growth for students in special education

Central coaching and teaching staff have engaged in professional learning and ongoing conversations around the use of pedagogical documentation expanding the range of available assessment tools, strategies and supports to build capacity across curriculum areas and panels. Educators are being challenged to critically reflect upon their assessment practices and consider how their relationships with students, their lived experiences, their power, privilege and biases impact how they interpret that student demonstration of learning and the learning experiences that they create.

Providing educators and students with the knowledge, tools and experiences to



implement authentic, effective assessment practices continues to be a focus as we move into the remainder of the school year. We are highlighting and honouring “Voices from the Field.” These podcast episodes highlight educator voices as they apply best practices around pedagogy and assessment. We continue to assess and acquire digital tools and resources that are culturally relevant and facilitate documentation and further enhance the ability of educators to provide meaningful descriptive feedback to students and their parents/caregivers/guardians.

### **Looking Forward**

Inclusive assessment practices that honour the lived experiences, knowledge and skills of students continue to be an important focus in our schools. Educators have been implementing differentiated assessments such as choice boards, inclusion of students’ first language(s), triangulation of assessments and development of collaborative solutions to address inequities by building inclusive spaces through the curriculum and assessment practices.

We continue to provide administrators with professional learning and concrete tools to lead their staff in the centering of effective, authentic assessment practices in school improvement planning. We look forward to extending professional learning for all staff that focuses on assessment “for” learning using descriptive feedback and use the assessment “for” and “as” learning to plan next steps in the learning experiences and instruction; and, “of” learning so that students can demonstrate their essential and enduring understandings. In addition to traditional “paper and pencil” tasks, we are looking to increase access to real-world, authentic, and open-ended assessments of learning, including performance tasks, in both virtual and in-person settings.

Increasing consistency of effective assessment practices throughout the system remains a priority. The incorporation of new and innovative digital tools provide educators, students and parents/caregivers/guardians with timely and meaningful feedback to inform their understanding of student progress throughout the learning process and provide educators with access to rich tasks shared by other educators.

### **Differentiated Supports for Those Who Have Had Greater Impacts from the Pandemic**

Before deciding which schools and classrooms would receive the limited resource of centrally assigned staff, the Centrally Assigned Principals (CAPs) consulted data on a variety of factors such as student achievement (literacy and numeracy), enrolment of students in virtual learning (last year and this year), as well as the Learning Opportunity Index (LOI). In addition, CAPs consulted with Learning Centre Executive Superintendents and Network Superintendents. During consultation, the following questions were considered regarding Differentiated Learning and Resourcing:

- 1. What professional learning is needed to build capacity so that schools can maintain the growth gained by the distribution of differentiated resources/intervention?*
- 2. What capacity building needs to happen in our system for schools to understand that they are responsible for the work and the changes that need to happen?*

### **Guiding Questions for Differentiated Assignment of Central Staff to Schools**

1. What are the central resources to support student learning and well-being?
2. What data informs our decisions?
3. How might we triangulate the data?
4. Looking at the central roles, which might be re-imagined to serve the most impacted?
5. Which schools will get the resources?
6. How will we decide when/ if the redistributed resource should be moved to another school?
7. How are we supporting schools that have significant numbers of students learning virtually?
8. How might we support Simultaneous Learning?
9. How will we measure the impact of the redistribution of resources/the intervention?

### **Information from the Field (Observations & Learnings)**

Centrally assigned staff received in-depth professional learning before they began working in schools. Each central staff member was assigned to a school based on system data and input from Superintendents, including anecdotal input from admin due to disproportionate impact from the pandemic. We prioritized the following in their work in schools:

- Eliminate disproportionate outcomes
- Building Relationships and Enhancing Belonging
- Use of Play/Outdoor Play
- Honouring Skills/Knowledge Gained During the Pandemic
- Assessment for Learning/As Learning
- Differentiated Supports for Those Who Have Had Greater Impacts from the Pandemic
- Staff Collaboration
- Digital Tools for Engaging Students/Families
- Virtual Learning 2021-2022

[Learn more here](#) about the differentiated supports provided by centrally assigned staff in schools across the system.

### **Going Forward**

We will continue to be flexible and adaptable and differentiate supports to schools based on the impact of the pandemic and will make adjustments as needed, based on challenges and identification of what is not working.

Some shifts in Coaching support will continue to address urgent needs and coaching support in some schools will be grouped strategically to provide consistent work with a focus on K-2 and Grade 6-8 (i.e. shifted some ERC, MYSSC, K-12 to work together as a team in some extreme situations, based on students' needs).

Coaches who share a school are collaborating to create a team approach with consistent messaging, support of each other and sometimes team teaching within that environment. Some are using a team PLC model to provide a school-wide approach to creating the positive conditions for learning (i.e. school-wide focus on



student voice, identity, etc.) where the team builds staff capacity through invitations to key teachers to be part of the planning of the PD.

Regular CAP meetings and updates with LC coaching staff are taking place as well as CAP visits to schools to consult, observe, support, advocate and mentor school administrators, as needed. Planned monthly meetings with other CAPs (SIP, Equity, Special Education, Caring & Safe Schools) are happening to discuss needs amongst schools and looking at schools in common to collaborate on supports (e.g. Special Education and Safe Schools have identified schools for combined support and LC CAPs have identified issues to programming or need for mentoring of school leaders).

### Staff Collaboration

**Staff collaboration is an integral part of the TDSB's focus as we continue to tackle the challenges of the pandemic and move forward with equity and anti-oppression work.** Collaboration occurs when staff work together to create conditions to support students and families and to ensure progress and success of all students, especially those from historically marginalized communities, newcomers to Canada and students with special needs. This happens either in person or virtually via the communication tools and cloud-based programs created for this purpose.

### Professional Learning Communities

Throughout this school year, educators have continued to enhance their knowledge and skills by engaging in job-embedded learning, collaborative inquiry, and reflecting on how their identities impact their practice. Increased access to digital tools and remote learning platforms has enhanced our ability to collaborate within schools and across the system.

The following are examples of ongoing professional learning opportunities:

- The creation of Google Currents communities in department areas enables educators to share innovative resources, digital tools and instructional strategies, to build collegial networks that reach beyond their local school communities, and to provide support and share successes and challenges.
- School-based and Central curriculum departments engage in monthly professional development sessions focussed on TDSB's strategic goals:
  - Creating conditions that support Academic Pathways,
  - Utilizing differentiated instructional,
  - Assessment and evaluation strategies,
  - Incorporating various digital tools and platforms for all learners,
  - Curated resources from our TDSB Virtual Library, (in person, virtual, and simultaneous).

Local school professional learning communities have benefited from the return of roles that engage and support learning through local school priorities and focus areas. For example, with the reopening of school libraries and return of teacher-librarians to these roles, local school capacities for supporting collaborative



instruction focussed on inquiry-based learning including the use of TDSBs rich engaging library collections has increased significantly.

### **Shared Leadership**

Strong partnerships between educators and schools/departments have extended to redesigned professional learning for educators. Instead of relying on outside consultants or district leaders, schools/departments have leveraged the expertise of existing educators to design and lead relevant professional development and redesign established curriculum. This approach has several advantages. Educator-designed and educator-led professional learning, in most cases, focus on problems of practice most relevant to other educators.

### **Collaboration within School Communities**

Collaboration within school communities is a shared responsibility and reciprocal process. The TDSB strives to provide programs and services that strengthen students' school experiences and enhance educator pedagogies. We work collaboratively to include all voices to ensure various voices and perspectives inform our work.

The following are examples of ongoing partnerships within school communities. The TDSB's commitment to enact Truth and Reconciliation is realized through a standing item 'Reconciliation Through Education' which includes monthly curated resources for immediate use in various classrooms utilizing a cross curricular approach. There is an ongoing partnership with the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement and the Human Rights Office to build staff capacity through an anti-Black racism framework. This collaboration works towards addressing discrimination and other inequities. Further, understanding students' various learning abilities is a central focus of the TDSB. Working closely with the Welcoming Communities Program and the Special Education, Assistive Technology Department, schools continue to work towards building success and fostering the engagement of students through various approaches to teaching and learning.

### **Coaching/Mentoring**

TDSB educators are actively involved in ongoing mentor/mentee networks where they collaborate formally and informally. Opportunities for beginning teachers and newly promoted administrators to receive ongoing support through monthly professional development sessions are provided by various departments and weekly office hours. For example, the science department collaborates regularly with teachers and guidance counsellors to provide hands-on resources that support classroom learning. The ESL/ELD department has monthly professional development sessions and weekly office hours to share resources and support ESL/ELD teachers with assessments and evaluations. Central Coaches (including Digital Content, Math, French) provide support to teachers, teacher-librarians, administrators, students, parents, and collaborate across subject departments.

### **Looking Forward**

Shared leadership, professional learning, and building staff capacity is an integral part of the TDSB's focus. This includes ongoing collaborative learning sessions, mentorship programs and partnerships with outside agencies and universities. These opportunities are ongoing and continue to be available to educators across panels



and subject areas to support their learning in the areas of instruction, resource selection, the purposeful use of digital tools and technology to support student learning and equity and inclusion.

Based on these experiences, collaboration helps to build educators' trust and expertise and enables schools to implement changes in instruction with greater ease and comfort. Educators report that collaboration is an integral feature of their work when the problems we ask them to solve are specific to their practice, common to a majority of educators in a particular school, and have a solution that can only be reached via collaboration. Educators shared that ongoing collaboration and mentorship has helped them in planning and supporting student learning.

*"I feel supported and I look forward to monthly meetings to learn with other teachers. I truly appreciate the resources shared."* (TDSB Elementary Educator)

*"Formal and informal mentorship helps me deal with daily operational challenges and problems of practice"* (TDSB Elementary Educator)

We will continue to build and sustain strong relationships with educators and schools by supporting school improvement planning that aligns with TDSB Pandemic Recovery Plan and the TDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan. From the beginning, staff were provided the space and time to diagnose problems such as simultaneous learning, inclusion of students with special needs and ELLs in academic pathways, and chronic achievement debts. From that work, we will continue to build a shared understanding of challenges facing schools and a shared vision for how collaborative culture can address those issues.

### Digital Tools for Engaging Students/Families

Students, families and educators have been required to quickly learn how to use a wide range of digital tools to communicate, collaborate and engage in new learning while building supportive relationships. **We continue to capitalize on the use of digital tools in order to support the engagement of students and families in an equitable way.** Supporting the purposeful use of technology and digital tools to ensure meaningful learning experiences for both in-person and virtual learners continues to be an area of focus for TDSB.

Our focus is on ensuring that there is equitable access to programs, resources, digital services and opportunities for students, staff and parents/caregivers. The TDSB Multi-Year Accessibility plan outlines our goals in ensuring digital resources and services are AODA compliant.

#### Engagement with Digital Tools

Schools deliver curriculum virtually using Google Classroom and/or Brightspace. Through professional learning, educators have used the features of virtual learning platforms to allow for significant interaction among students, families and educators. These features also give families the opportunity for deeper insight into their child's educational experience and follow student progress.

Given the impacts the pandemic has had on all students, but specifically those who are in greater need of support, we have focused on the direct engagement of these students and their families through virtual student and parent conferences, online translation tools, and live transcription. Our goal is to give voice to students and their families so we can better understand and meet their needs.

*“This year virtual teaching has been better as I feel a lot more comfortable and confident with using google classroom and brightspace platform. The parents have also been supportive and more willing to help their child learn at home.”* (TDSB Elementary Educator)

We have seen an increase in student engagement through the use of digital tools. Educators, students, and families employ assistive technology strategies such as using Read and Write for Google Chrome to support learner needs. Shared leadership, professional learning, and building staff capacity are an integral part of the TDSB’s focus. Creating conditions to support students in virtual or simultaneous environments is crucial to ensuring their progress and success.

The TDSB Virtual Library continues to evolve to support inquiry, research and pleasure reading and significant work continues to streamline access. New resources have been added to the Virtual Library including more French language titles, the *4 Canoes* platform featuring ebooks with Indigenous perspectives, and additional titles that support resource selection through critically conscious and decolonizing lenses. Digital Content Coaches provide support to educators, teacher-librarians, administrators, students, parents, coaches and collaborate with a number of subject departments to deepen the use of TDSB-licensed digital content resources and to build information literacy skills.

Integrating digital tools and content allows students multiple opportunities to create, communicate and learn. New Assistive Technology programs are aimed at providing web-based access to support students in-class and virtually and tools that allow students to demonstrate their understanding in flexible and varied ways. The public assistive technology website includes resources for parents looking to support students at home.

TDSB educators across the system, with the support of Hybrid-Teacher Digital Lead Learners and Coaches, are actively involved in an ongoing professional learning and mentor/mentee networking where they collaborate formally and informally. They also engage in monthly professional development sessions concentrating on the Multi-Year Strategic Plan and Pandemic Recovery Plan in terms of differentiated support to groups who were most impacted by the Pandemic. Topics include:

- Utilizing differentiated instructional, assessment and evaluation strategies for an inclusive classroom
- Purposeful use of various digital tools and platforms for all learners
- Effectively using curated resources from the TDSB Virtual Library
- Considerations, strategies and accommodations for teaching and learning in diverse environments (in person, virtual and simultaneous).

The [Kindergarten iPad Initiative](#) and the [1:1 Student Device Program](#) leverage the use of digital tools to capture student thinking and learning as well as engage families and circles of care in the learning process. Both in-person and virtual learners are empowered to explore, share knowledge with peers, educators and families and remain connected to the classroom community.

### Challenges and Next Steps

TDSB is very clear in its commitment to ensuring that resources used in schools meet our strategic goals in ensuring equity, inclusion and an anti-oppressive stance. As we move forward with the use of digital tools to engage students and families and to enhance teaching and learning, we will continue to refine the process for selection of digital resources. With the vast number of tools available for students and educators, it is important to choose wisely and strategically. Central staff are currently working to develop a process to support schools in their selection of digital tools with consideration for the multiple and complex procedures and policies that are engaged with each selection. With greater reliance on digital/virtual learning it is critical that educators and students have the devices and internet access to allow them to excel in a digital environment. TDSB also has a responsibility to support the digital learning needs of parents/guardians and caregivers so they can continue to play a supportive role in their children's education.

[Learn more here](#) about the digital tools for engaging students and families.

### Virtual Learning 2021-2022

*"The level of accountability and connection to a school community that VS students have this year in relation to last is significant." (TDSB Elementary Administrator)*

*"Virtual learning was so much better this term than last year's because we are a part of our own school again and we get to teach the students that are from our own school community that many of us have had the privilege to teach before. We also have the support of our own administrator and other staff members and we no longer feel disconnected from it all!" (TDSB Elementary Educator)*

Over the summer, plans were made to deliver fully virtual learning classes for students in JK to Grade 8 for the 2021-2022 school year. Elementary virtual learning classes were established in local schools to increase the ability to build relationships and develop a sense of belonging for staff, students, and parents/caregivers. In September, approximately 18,000 students started in virtual learning classes in a class at their home school or in another school in their area.

Secondary administrators and Superintendents developed plans to accommodate approximately 7,000 students in virtual learning for the 2021-2022 school year. A decision was made to offer virtual learning at the same time as in-person instruction (simultaneous learning), which maximizes student voice, choice and agency in terms of program/course selection, as well as in elective courses which enhances engagement, well-being, and achievement. Simultaneous learning also allows for



seamless transition back to in-person learning, enables students and families to remain connected to their school community and school-based staff resources, and affords more students the opportunity to remain in their specialized programs.

Students in Special Education Intensive Support Programs (ISP) other than Giftedness, have stayed connected to their school through simultaneous learning. A key guiding principle for learners in ISP programs is to focus on minimizing transitions and maintaining connections between students and their peers and the staff they are familiar with in their program and school. Given the many supports and resources attached to these programs (e.g. PSSP staff, counselling, school administration, etc.), maintaining a connection between students and families with the school where the program is located is paramount. The intentional decision to maintain ISP in the simultaneous model also allows greater flexibility for students who require differentiated support and need to move between virtual learning and in-person learning as part of their educational plan due to unpredictable circumstances. We were able to successfully serve students in ISP programs during school closures last year using this model. Given that these programs have small class size limits and multiple staff in the classroom, we have a better ability to meet educational needs using this model.

As elementary students engaged in fully virtual learning are taught by educators in local home schools, professional learning opportunities are available for in-person and virtual learning educators. Educators can support each other, collaborate and benefit from their collective knowledge. Simultaneous exploration around [play-based learning](#) which centres work around student joy are shared between educators so that play is fluid between face to face and virtual learning. These experiences are shared so that we continue to build capacity around play in all areas of the curriculum and across all learning environments.

For secondary programming, decisions surrounding the methods of instruction for Semester Two were guided by input from a student survey and a staff *ThoughtExchange*. While teachers felt simultaneous learning should not continue in Semester Two, a higher proportion of students support the continuation of simultaneous learning. With the recognition that a dedicated Virtual School was not feasible for Semester Two, schools reduced the number of simultaneous classes for teachers through a combination of reducing the number of optional courses in Grades 9 and 10, offering specialized programming virtually where a viable cohort exists, offering experiential/"hands on" courses only in-person and working with the Virtual Learning Team to form "hubs." The efforts to share students between schools reduced the overall number of classes with simultaneous learning while maintaining as many student choices as possible in terms of courses and programs.

Elementary and secondary educators continue to develop skills to teach virtually and simultaneously. To continue to build capacity amongst Secondary teachers and Administrators, we maintain our commitment to professional learning to help educators create the conditions for simultaneous and virtual learning in classrooms, including webinars, "Office Hours" to tap into the expertise of teacher colleagues, and weekly "Tip Sheets" for educators to use in classes. Special Education and Inclusion Consultants have also continued to provide simultaneous learning to students in Elementary Intensive Support Programs.



Another focus of professional learning has been play in middle and secondary classrooms. For example, through virtual learning opportunities, play is being explored through providing choice, voice and autonomy in student learning while leveraging digital tools in all disciplines.

*“I’ve been experimenting with game-based learning in my English classes this year. In English, we’ve been playing indie games, What Remains of Edith Finch and Before I Forget to learn more about literary elements, media codes and conventions, and the power of immersive storytelling. It has been incredible for students to explore different stories and worlds and demonstrate their understanding with hands-on and immersive deep learning experiences with technology.” (TDSB Secondary Educator)*

View a powerful video by an Intermediate Virtual School educator who embeds joy, play, and building and sharing memories into learning. [▶ Play in Virtual Classes](#)

The [Guidelines for Moving from In-Person to Remote Learning](#) were designed to help with implementing remote learning in line with the TDSB Guiding Principles and Commitment to Indigenous Education, Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression.

### **Short Term Virtual Learning Resources**

Families and students engaged in short-term virtual learning for a period of time can remain connected to their school, classroom and educators and engage in learning opportunities through their Brightspace or Google Classroom. [Resources for families and students](#) are available on the TDSB website to supplement classroom learning.

The [Educator Resources: Short Term Virtual Learning](#) is a collection of resources, which complement classroom learning and include digital learning resources, non-digital resources, and broadcast learning opportunities (e.g. story-telling with Itah Sadu and daily outdoor education programs). Within each grade level learning activities (Grades K-8), the importance of learning through play is highlighted, with a series of “Take Time to Play” that allow students to embrace self-directed learning through play and inquiry based on interests, strengths and passions.

*“I was really grateful to see that there were concrete, curriculum aligned assignments that my elementary aged boys will do this week.” (TDSB Parent)*

*“I wanted to say Thank you. I know that you are working tirelessly making important decisions and guiding all of us through not only Covid but snow days. I don’t think you get the “thank yous” from parents or students that we get and you probably don’t hear it enough. So thank you! Also, the broadcasts today were so inspiring. Your amazing work is appreciated!” (TDSB Principal)*

*“My four year old is home from school this week and yesterday he tuned in to your online lesson about water. He was really taken with it, stuck close to the screen with his lego and wanted to tell me all about wells and how we clean sewage out of water... He wants to do “more school with those teachers.” (TDSB Parent)*