



HAMILTON-
WENTWORTH
DISTRICT
SCHOOL
BOARD

TRANSFORMING LEARNING *Everywhere*



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A L L S T U D E N T S A C H I E V I N G T H E I R F U L L P O T E N T I A L

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board is committed to creating a personalized, collaborative inquiry based learning environment for each student. We believe this learning environment supports student achievement and well-being and prepares our students to participate effectively in our physical and digital world. We engage our students. We enhance their love of learning. Our students have the opportunities to collaborate with classmates, teachers, and others around the world and we expand our classrooms through experiential learning, blended learning and learning in a virtual environment. We believe our students will achieve, through effective instruction accelerated by technology, inviting them to achieve in both the physical world of the classroom and the digital world. Digital technology bridges these two environments and helps our students operate within them. Though we believe that all staff and students need their own tablet to make this vision a reality, the focus of our efforts is changing instruction and learning.



HWDSB is not engaged in a technology project; rather, we are engaged in a process to enhance instruction, to invite students to engage in rich learning tasks and to rely on student voice to drive the learning environment in classrooms and through technology.



Our commitment to create a personalized, collaborative inquiry based learning environments also impacts our vision of how we are using technology and digital resources to support our students. HWDSB is not engaged in a technology project; rather, we are engaged in a process to enhance instruction, to invite students to engage in rich learning tasks and to rely on students to drive the learning environment, supported by technology. Teachers have a significant role to play in this transformation. Though we are responding to the strengths and interests of our students, we also understand the importance of the curriculum, and we recognize the expertise of teachers to provide the appropriate support, direction and opportunities to our students. Using technology is no longer an option for us. We must support our students to succeed in the physical and the digital world. Students who do not have this opportunity to learn in the digital world will be disadvantaged, something that we cannot accept.

We are examining how the learning process in our classrooms encourages creativity, promotes critical thinking and invites students to ask questions, search for answers, apply their learning in multiple situations, and communicate their learning to others. In other words, inquiry is at the core of this commitment. The relationship between teachers and students as well as students with their peers is changing in every classroom. This change is an opportunity to enhance our students’ engagement and achievement.¹

When I use the term inquiry, I draw upon the Ontario Ministry of Education Capacity Building Series on Inquiry-Based learning. Inquiry-based learning is defined in this document as “an approach to teaching and learning that places students’ questions, ideas, and observations at the centre of the learning experience”.² We are creating conditions for our students and staff to create new knowledge emerging from the inquiry process, and to apply this new knowledge to real life settings.

We believe in our students. We have high expectations for our students, and we believe that our role as educators is changing as our world changes. We are hearing arguments these days that we need to “return to the basics” so our students can achieve or that the inquiry process is not offering students the skills they need to achieve. I would argue that inquiry based learning is crucial because it promotes student engagement because our students are at the centre of the process. We can provide inquiry based learning opportunities and still ensure that our students have the foundation. In other words, our students need a balanced program to succeed. This program includes foundational knowledge and skills and the opportunity for our students to own their learning. Having said this, “the basics” are changing. Yes, our students must be effective readers and writers

¹ Michael Fullan and Maria Langworthy, A Rich Seam, How New Pedagogies Find Deep Learning, January 2014
² Ontario Ministry of Education, Capacity Building Series, May 2013

engagement





and they need to be proficient in math. They also must create, think, evaluate, and collaborate in order to be successful students, and engaged citizens.

We believe technology is a tool that enhances this learning process, and we believe technology influences how students learn. The learning resources we use have a powerful impact on how our students learn. For example, when we use textbooks for learning, we can do certain things with this resource. Students may read the text. They may answer questions from the text. In addition, this text may be the foundation for class discussion or other classroom projects. Though there is nothing wrong with a textbook, this learning resource is a static one. Further, we have to be careful that technology is not simply used to duplicate existing practices on-line. Using technology is not intended to perpetuate some exciting paradigms in learning; rather using technology supports change in terms of the relationships in the classroom, the learning tasks in which students are involved and the assessment practise that allow teachers to understand and enhance progress.³ Our vision for learning is a dynamic one and in order for this dynamic learning environment to exist, we know that supporting our teachers is key. If we are supporting students to learn in both the physical learning environment and the digital learning environment, educators must be comfortable learning in these two worlds as well. Sometimes living effectively in the physical and digital world means putting technology aside in order to engage in rich discussions. Our commitment is to help our students navigate the waters of our present age in order to be effective citizens today and in the world that is emerging in the months and years ahead. This navigation cannot happen without technology and yet it includes teaching our students when using technology may not be healthy or productive and how to use these technological tools appropriately.

David Price, stated in a recent Canadian Education Association article (2014): “Leaders understand that innovation is a

³Michael Fullan and Maria Langworthy, A Rich Seam, How New Pedagogies Find Deep Learning, January 2014

⁴David Price, The Fear Factor, Canada Education, November 2013

mindset, a culture, not a one-off experiment. To support that mindset, they de-privatize the act of teaching, seeing teaching as a team sport, not a solitary activity. Critically, innovative schools seem to share a common characteristic: their teachers are expected to be designers of learning, not simply deliverers.”

The personalized, collaborative inquiry based learning environments we are trying to create for staff and students aligns with the values addressed in Price’s reflections. Ron Canuel in the same publication (2014) stated:

“True innovation in education will only happen when a new structure is created: one that nurtures critical thinkers, supports risk-takers, and encourages ongoing transformation and that places a high value on creative and insightful learning/teaching in classrooms.”⁵

Some of the key questions we are facing in HWDSB are: What supports do our teachers need to be effective in the digital and physical environment and what “tools” must the system provide in order to create the rich learning opportunities our students deserve? Further, what must change in our system in order to afford and provide these technological tools to each student? These questions support the foundation for our vision.

Our Beliefs

We envision a personalized, collaborative inquiry based learning environment where students own their learning and teacher practice supports student learning in many ways.

We believe that effective instruction improves student achievement. Effective instruction is situated in today’s physical and digital world as previously described.

We believe that educators play a crucial role in creating learning conditions where our students improve their ability to think,

create, communicate and enhance their sense of well-being. We believe technology accelerates the ability for educators and students to learn deeply; never forgetting that the focus is on effective instruction and on the learning, not the tools.

In order to ensure that student learning, facilitated through the use of digital tools and resources, is not something constrained to a once weekly foray into the Computer Lab, we need to find ways to bring that technology into the classroom, rather than bringing the class to the technology. Sharing one room of 30 devices across numerous classes is not an effective strategy.

We know that putting devices at the point of learning, for staff and students, is an effective way to create collaborative, inquiry-based learning environments. It also provides equitable access to technology for each and every student in HWDSB.

To summarize our direction:

- Personalized, collaborative, inquiry based learning will exist in every classroom in HWDSB supported by 1:1 technology.
- In order to fulfill this vision:
 - Students will take ownership for their learning
 - Teachers need the confidence and support to shift the learning environment as appropriate so that inquiry is

⁵Ron Canuel, Innovation vs Circulasticity, Canada Education, November 2013



at the core

- The system must create conditions for the learning (e.g. risk taking, safety, trust, innovation) and the tools to enable it (e.g. technology, digital resources, bandwidth) as well as provide clarity regarding how we will measure effectiveness.

Implementation Plan

In order to support effective instruction and to provide rich learning opportunities for students, we will implement the following guiding principles:

- Teacher access to technology and digital resources that impact classroom practice is our priority. This access is supported by professional learning opportunities.
- Though many different and effective technologies exist, in order to provide support for teacher access, HWDSB will fully implement our 1:1 tablet technology plan by September 2019 subject to ongoing Board approval. Initial approval has been given in March 2014.
- In order for us to afford this plan, we will examine our present budget and change practice as necessary especially in terms of purchasing textbooks, workbooks and photocopying.
- Supporting teachers is our focus. When teachers feel confident to change the learning environment, to invite students to own their learning and engage in rich learning tasks, and to assess student learning in a myriad of ways, students will achieve.
- We value effective instruction and inquiry based learning environments enabled by technology. We are not distributing technology as an end in itself.
- Different models of professional learning will be developed to support this direction.
- We will begin with seven elementary schools, three secondary programs focussing on assistive technology and one

secondary school (Henderson Secondary School) in 2014 and our new North secondary school in 2016.

- In order to maximize our resources, the purchase of different technologies beyond the 1:1 project will adhere to clear criteria.
- Systemic change requires that we support one technological device. Though this direction may challenge those who are “technologically comfortable” and who wish to use many devices, it is a necessary direction to achieve our goal of supporting teachers in 100% of our classrooms. This direction will not exclude students from bringing their own device.
- Each student’s access to a personal technological device and wireless capability in every learning space supports HWDSB’s commitment to equity.
- We will complete our wireless project in December 2014. Every learning and office space will be wireless and we will monitor our usage closely so that we have the appropriate bandwidth in our system.

In Summary

- The positive relationships between the student and the teacher and between students is critical for student achievement and well-being to improve.
- Students learn most effectively when their interests, questions and ideas are a priority in the learning process, and when they are engaged in conversations about learning and are asked to voice their opinions about how they learn best.
- Students learn in unique ways. Different learning opportunities both individually and collaboratively need to be provided and created by both teachers and students. Effective instruction and engagement in deep learning tasks remain our priority.
- Teachers play a significant role in assisting students to engage in the inquiry process, always keeping in mind curriculum expectations. Because of this pivotal role, support for teachers and their access to appropriate learning



equity

resources is paramount. This support includes the effective use of technology to enhance creativity, critical thinking, communication and the development of our students as citizens in a digital world.

- Though each subject area has specific expectations and skills that our students must learn, we understand that an interdisciplinary, inquiry approach will also be relevant for our students.
- We possess a moral imperative to provide equitable opportunities to all of our students and access to technology supports this direction.
- We will study our initial project so as to inform this direction where every student will be engaged in problem solving and inquiry accelerated by digital resources and technology.
- “Transforming Learning Everywhere” aligns effectively with our arts strategy which promotes creativity and our positive school climate work which promotes voice, resilience and relationships.



Our Theory of Action

By providing teachers support to create personalized, collaborative inquiry based learning conditions and by providing appropriate access to technology and digital resources that reflect our ever changing and digital world, our students will be engaged and their achievement will improve.

What we are doing:

Providing enhanced learning environments through 1:1 technology that support effective instruction, equitable access, leading to improved engagement and achievement.

Why are we doing this:

When students own their learning supported by the expertise of the teacher and enabled by technology, student engagement and achievement improves, and our students become contributing citizens in our physical and digital world.

How are we doing this:

Each student and teacher in HWDSB will have their own tablet by September 2019 (subject to continued Board approval). Other staff will be provided the appropriate technology where required as per existing practice.

We will engage in the following projects between 2014-2016 to assist our implementation and we will research their impact on student achievement and well-being:

- 7 elementary schools
- 2 secondary schools
- 3 assistive technology projects supporting students with special needs

We will continue our work with integrative thinking, and we will examine how this learning will support this proposed vision.

We will analyze our spending in HWDSB and make appropriate changes. We will also support teachers to use technology and digital resources more comfortably so that we can spend less on our textbook resources and other paper based supplies.

Together, we will stop talking about changing teaching and learning so that our students may achieve in both our physical and digital world. Instead, we will make it happen.



Dr. John Malloy, Director of Education
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
April 2014



