

### Grade One Student Surprises Mom with the Power of a Mindful Moment

I have a very active middle child who is in Grade One at Swansea P.S. On a spring night after shopping at the market, we went outdoors for a little play in the park. My son was swinging very high on the swings, and suddenly, he surprised me by saying, "now I will shut my eyes for a moment of mindfulness." He proceeded to shut his eyes and do a full body scan, head to toe thanking each body part for what it does (e.g. I thank my head for thinking, etc.), and then he was silent for a minute as he swung. When he reopened his eyes, he stated proudly, "see mom, I swung higher because of mindfulness." I nearly fell off my seat that he had this language and could turn into himself in silence and relax. We are so grateful that his teacher, Ms. April Giles, taught him to do this. She has helped give him a greater feeling of self-control and calm. I had heard about mindfulness, but had no idea it could work on my six-year-old, nor that he would take to it. I didn't even know this was something they were doing in the classroom! Thank you for this. It's a gift for him and all of us!

(By: Caroline, Parent - Swansea P.S.)



### Agincourt C.I. Mental Health & Wellness Week: #BeStrong & #LoveOneAnother

#### Agincourt is Mindful!

What a week of positive energy! A few weeks ago, Agincourt C.I. hosted its first annual Mental Health and Wellness Week. Students participated in lunch time events all week such as various clubs sharing stress relieving ideas, a wellness walk, a SnapHunt photo event, a road show of community volunteer opportunities from Steeles L'Amoreaux Youth Empowerment (SLYE) and button making. Our students also enjoyed bubble making, creating an encouragement tree and even hosting a limbo scooter contest in the gym! Agincourt C.I. students, staff and parents are 100% mindful of the importance of positive mental well-being and support the development of a healthy mind, body and spirit.



Students engage in student-led stress relievers: Bubble making (above), and scooter limbo (left)!



#### First Annual A.C.I. Mental Health & Well-Being Video Showcase

The Agincourt CI Video Showcase started off as class projects and the senior students went above and beyond to highlight positive mental well-being. Video topics ranged from depression and anxiety to active listening, open mindedness and encouraging one another. Not judging others by their exterior, erasing stigma and opening up discussions about mental health were the overarching themes. Many students attended the first annual video showcase on Tuesday of the Wellness Week to see all of the engaging wellness videos. Thank you Agincourt CI for making a difference!



Students gather in the ACI Library for the First Annual Mental Health and Well-Being Video Showcase

(By: Stacey Tomioka & Gabe Lee, Teachers – Agincourt C.I.)

## Reflections on the Envision Conference

On May 5, 2016, I attended a conference unlike anything I have ever experienced. The Envision Conference is a conference held in the TDSB to raise awareness of racism, homophobia, ableism and gender-based violence. These are forms of discrimination that are not nearly spoken of enough, especially in schools. Envision is merely the start of change in the TDSB.

The day started in the auditorium of Central Technical High School with the introduction of the main speakers and what the day was all about. The first speaker that went up was an Aboriginal two spirited elder. The Elder acknowledged the traditional lands that Central Tech was situated on and talked about the importance of identity. That's how I knew this was going to be a good day. After that, a young spoken word poet performed two of her poems and spoke of her experiences after moving here from Egypt. She talked about how important it was to spread love and to be yourself.

After the opening presentations, everyone dispersed to their morning workshops. I went to the Planned Parenthood Toronto workshop "What Does a Positive Space Look Like?" In this workshop, we discussed how we can turn schools and classrooms into safe and positive places for everyone. One of the major things we talked about was all-gender washrooms and that all schools should have at least one well-maintained all-gender washroom.

In the cafeteria, there were multiple tables set up with buttons, pins, magazines, t-shirts and brochures for different LGBTQ+ helplines. Although it was expected, I was still quite surprised to see the diversity of students and staff in the crowd. It was a sea of color; dyed hair, rainbows and so many forms of beautiful self-expression. **I felt like a puzzle piece that was finally put in the right place.**

In the afternoon, I went to a workshop called "Coming Out or Inviting In". There we discussed the differences between coming out and staying in the closet, stereotypes surrounding LGBTQ+ people, and the lack of representation in the media.



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PRIDE MONTH: JUNE 1 - JULY 3, 2016

### Youth Art Fair Call for Submissions!



We are currently seeking young artists as well as youth art groups and programs interested in showcasing their expressive work!

We are looking for artistic creations that highlight LGBTQ+ identities, rights, experiences of mental health and well-being, and social justice initiatives!

If you are interested in submitting your work or learning more, please contact Sara McDougall at [communityhealth@pridetoronto.com](mailto:communityhealth@pridetoronto.com)

For those interested in submitting your expressive art work highlighting LGBTQ+ identities, rights, experiences of mental health and well-being, and social justice, please connect with Pride Toronto at [communityhealth@pridetoronto.com](mailto:communityhealth@pridetoronto.com)

At the end of the day, there was a panel discussion in the auditorium. The group of panelists was very diverse; ranging from a trans-feminine white man, to an interracial woman. They discussed their struggles with identity and the importance of loving who you are and being yourself. Before the panel, a young girl performed a song she wrote about self-expression.

I learned a lot from this experience and could not be more thankful that a teacher at my school approached me about this conference. I had never been immersed in an environment like that and I have never felt as safe and myself as I did in those workshops. But again, this is just the start. We need to take action. Every staff member should make it a goal to make sure all students are comfortable and feel safe in their learning environments and hopefully, someday soon, we will start seeing all-gender washrooms and safe spaces in every school.

*(By: Jules, student at John G. Althouse Middle School)*

## More Reflections from the Day

"Thank you for the amazing conference. My students could not stop talking about it. I loved the workshops and the new ideas. You put lots of effort and passion into organizing such an event."  
*Teacher, Bessborough Elementary and Middle School*

"Thank you for a great conference yesterday. What a great experience for our students to participate in; a very strong message of affirmation and empowerment!"  
*Teacher, Annette Street Public School*

### Body Image Seminars at JGA with Brie Mathers

John G. Althouse Middle School arranged for body image activist Brie Mathers to present two very powerful presentations to our intermediate girls and boys last month. "Love the Skin You're In" is a life-changing presentation intended to support the Mental Health and Well-Being of today's youth! In our connected age, young people are inundated with media idealizations about what it is to be a woman or man that are limiting and frequently hazardous to their health. Studies show that many girls would rather be considered "sexy" than "smart" and young men need to be "macho" rather than a "gentleman." "Love the Skin You're In" is a transformative presentation that invites young women and men to question the socioeconomic underpinnings of how they are falsely represented, inspiring them to reinvent inclusive beauty and body image notions and



JGA Grade 7 and 8 girls with Brie Mathers



Brie Mathers with Grade 7 & 8 boys

reconsider the value of self-worth, empathy and community. This engaging body image, media literacy and anti-bullying workshop powerfully impacted our JGA students with its messages of self-esteem and choice. The impact statements from John G. students and staff who attended the presentations were extremely positive.

(By: Brian D'Andrade, Vice-Principal, John G. Althouse Middle School)

### Yoga and Meditation at Frank Oke S.S.

Since March 2016, students at Frank Oke Secondary School have been participating in meditation and yoga twice a week. Also, sensory objects have been introduced into the classrooms. This initiative has resulted in students learning about self-regulation and self-calming techniques. According to Child and Youth Worker, Alina Chiappetta, "It's really exciting to see students looking forward to the daily meditation and yoga classes. They keep asking for more because they find that it helps."

(By: Joanne D'Addio, Vice-Principal, Frank Oke S.S.)



Students and staff participating in daily yoga (top).



Sensory objects help students focus and self-regulate (left)

### PD Session for WR5: Tools for Teaching and Learning

Over 20 schools in WR5 came together at 1 Civic Centre Court on May 3rd to focus on teaching and learning tools that support mental health and well-being. Topics included using physical activity, art, journaling, meditation, yoga, and culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy to support well-being. In addition, staff learned about the importance of self-care techniques. Overall, it was an amazing day for WR5 staff to come together and focus on our community's mental health and well-being.

(By: WR5 Community, Culture and Well-Being Committee)



Students using graffiti as a way to focus and relax (above left).



Staff talking about culturally relevant pedagogy (above right).

Yoga and meditation as a way to calm the mind (below).



## Putting EQAO Testing into Perspective

To All My Amazing Students,

Tomorrow you will start this week's EQAO testing. I know how hard you have worked, but there is something very important that I want you to know:

EQAO does not assess all of what makes you special and unique. The people who create these tests and score them do not know each of you the way I do, and they certainly don't know you like your families know you.

They do not know that some of you speak two languages, or that you love to sing or draw. They have not seen your natural talent for dancing or dribbling a soccer ball. They do not know what a great friend you are, that your laughter can brighten the darkest day, or that your face turns red when you're embarrassed. :) They do not know that you participate in choir, Brownies, or swimming lessons, or that you have gone up several levels in Raz-Kids. They do not know how curious you are, that you love to tell stories, that you are a great Kindergarten Reading Buddy to a little friend who adores you, or that you have memorized dozens of poems and rhymes (some of which were really hard and really long!). They do not know that you are kind and thoughtful or that you have worked really hard this year to find your Growth Mindset and love your mistakes. They do not know how amazing you are at being Mindful or that every day you try to be and do you're very best.

The scores you get from this test will tell you something, but they will not tell you everything. There are so many different ways of being smart. And believe me, you are smart, my lovelies! You are creative. You are strong. You are the light that brightens my day. So when you sit down tomorrow with the first booklet, remember that there is no way to "test" all of the amazing and awesome things that make you YOU!

I believe in you. You are ready. Let's do this!

Love,

Mrs. Burch Jones

(By: Wendy Burch Jones, Teacher, Victoria Village Public School)

(This letter was written for a class of Grade 3 students the night before their first EQAO testing session. It was inspired by one originally written in 1999 by a teacher from Massachusetts named Mary Ginle, who was addressing state-wide standardized testing.)

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*On behalf of the Mental Health and Well-Being Core Leadership Team*

*We wish everyone an amazing, enjoyable, refreshing and safe summer.*

*We hope you do what inspires and relaxes you. We hope you create lasting memories with the ones you cherish. More importantly, we hope you make time to care for YOU! Thank you for a great year.*

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### **Mental Health and Well-Being Core Leadership Team**

Heather Johnson & Saleem Haniff, Social Workers, Mental Health and Well-Being – System Support

Rose D'Alimonte, Chief of Social Work/Attendance – Area D

Marcia Powers-Dunlop, Interim Senior Manager – Professional Support Services

Sandy Spyropoulos, Executive Superintendent – Student Support Services and Care

Leslie Fox, Executive Assistant – Student Support Services and Care

