



TDSB Virtual Secondary School Family Newsletter

Welcome to the April 2021 issue of the Virtual School Family Newsletter. We hope everyone enjoyed some down time during the April break earlier this month.

Virtual school students continue to show great perseverance and resiliency during what has been a challenging year online. We are encouraged by the new and interesting projects and initiatives happening in virtual classrooms and across the Virtual School every month! We are proud to share some of these with you in this month's newsletter.

For more information and updates, please visit www.tdsb.on.ca/virtualschool and follow along on Twitter @tdsbvs.

Join Virtual Drop-In Hours

Connect directly with staff from TDSB Professional Support Services to explore ideas regarding your child or youth's mental health and well-being.

[Tuesdays, 10 a.m. - 11 a.m.](#)
[Thursdays 7 p.m. - 8 p.m.](#)

Children's Mental Health Week

The TDSB recognizes Children's Mental Health Week (CMHW) from May 3 to 7. To help support student mental health and well-being for all, the Professional Support Services team has developed a wide variety of resources in line with this year's theme of Coping, Caring and Connecting. Please access these resources, and many more, [online](#). And, follow the conversation online at [#copingcaringconnecting](#) and see how schools are supporting mental health and well-being with their students.

Toronto Public Health (TPH) Vaccine Update

As the COVID-19 vaccine rollout happens across the City of Toronto, please [visit the TPH website](#) for the most up to date information and vaccination resources available in many languages.

TDSB Honours International Day of Pink

This year, International Day of Pink was on April 14 during the April Break. However, the TDSB still honoured the day by encouraging staff and students to wear pink to raise awareness to stop discrimination, gender-based bullying, homophobia, and transphobia, by raising the rainbow flag at TDSB headquarters and by turning the main page of the TDSB website pink. International Day of Pink is a way for the TDSB to show its support and stand in solidarity with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community to continue fighting for equality and acceptance.

April Heritage Months at the TDSB

During the month of April, the TDSB Celebrates the following heritage months:

- [Hispanic Heritage Month](#)
- [Latin-America History Month](#)
- [Sikh Heritage Month](#)

To learn more about each heritage month and the planned activities and celebrations, please visit the TDSB website using the links above.



Virtual Poetry *SLAM!*

The end of March saw the First-Ever Virtual Poetry *SLAM!* for TDSB students. This event was a chance to hear and celebrate student *voice* and the unique beauty of diverse identities that make up the TDSB.

What is a Poetry Slam? Wikipedia says, "A poetry slam is a competition arts event, in which poets perform spoken word poetry before a live audience and a panel of judges...While formats can vary, slams are often loud and lively, with audience participation, cheering and dramatic delivery."

Coached by VSS teacher, Ms. Fingerhutt, our students performed like pros, competing against other students from across TDSB. The student poets spoke about highly significant topics-- mental health, increased inclusion of Indigenous voices, as well as standing tall against Anti-Black and Anti-Asian racism.

[Read the poems by Virtual Secondary School students here.](#)

There's no "I" in Team...but there is an "I" in Incredible!

During the past quad, the **Career Studies/ Guidance Department** has participated in a variety of experiential pathway opportunities for virtual learners and has had guest speakers from local colleges (George Brown & Centennial College); universities (University of Toronto & York U) and even as far away as British Columbia (ChatterHigh)! As a group, the department learned about conventional and non-conventional career pathways and gained insights into the many opportunities offered through OYAP and the skill trades. Finally, students were able to further plan for their future pathways by learning about

how to fund their post-secondary education through scholarships, bursaries and loans.

Through constant collaboration, the team supported each other's learning by sharing resources and ideas for the curriculum and student learning needs.

Virtual Career Studies "*Show Me Your Money*" Competition

In April, a selection of TDSB Virtual Career Studies classes competed in the "*Show Me Your Money*" Competition organized by Bay Street Deconstructed (BSD). This Canadian non-profit organization led an informative, interactive, fun workshop for over 100 Grade 10 students, introducing them to the world of finance. They hosted a real time virtual session, where there were top 3 winners based on points earned.

To help prepare for the competition, students were given a professionally designed interactive research activity related to 10 financial services. Students also met real life Canadian actors, each of whom represented a financial service. Complete with scenarios and an individual *Kahoot!* game for each, students learned of each area in an interactive, fun, and fast-paced manner. BSD also provided a post session activity to consolidate student learning.

Career Studies students did an awesome job and made it to the top 3 for both sessions! Overall, the BSD program was well structured to meet the needs of remote, in-classroom, as well as combination learning environments.

Congratulations to Laksikan Navaratnarasa (1st) and Shayann Jordan (2nd) in the "*Show Me Your Money*" game morning session and to Emily Ngo (2nd) and Fabiha Nazat (3rd) in the afternoon session.

The Creators' Club

The Creators' Club is a diverse and innovative space where students who are passionate about creating things come together to share ideas. The club acts as a safe place where people can critique, criticize, and admire each other's masterpieces. All are welcome to join the club and introduce their cool contraptions whether it be comic strips, digital art, music, spoken word or even a coded videogame.

Stay tuned for an exciting announcement about our upcoming showcase! For more details, follow the Creator's Club on Instagram @tdsb.creator_club

We are delighted to share some of the creations of the Creators' Club!





VSS takes Gold and Silver at Toronto-Wide Science Fair

On April 15 students competed in the Toronto Wide Science Fair. This year's competition was held virtually and highlighted the ingenuity and creativity of students conducting science investigations and innovations online.

Two Grade 11 Virtual Secondary School students were honoured with a Gold and Silver medal. Andrew Mao's innovative project in which he developed and tested a concussion detector sensor in hockey helmets, garnered him a Gold Medal and advancement to the National Canadian Science Fair that will be held online in May. Congratulations also go to Arissa Azeem, whose project on occlusive agents in skin creams earned her a Silver Medal.

Congratulations to all students who competed in the science fair. Read more and see the projects online at www.torontosciencefair.ca.

Music is in the Air at VSS

For the final performance task of Grade 10 Music class, students could present something resulting from the creative process, demonstrate learning on an instrument in some way, and use technology to present. There were many unique ideas - some students did Youtube video demonstrations, some did animations with original compositions, and some composed on digital music platforms.

Ahmed Abdelghany decided to learn some chords on his younger sister's ukelele, and he learned to play "Can't Help Falling in Love" on piano as well. The result was this video where he edited himself playing both. [View the video here!](#)

VSS Grade 11/12 Vocal Music Students Share Mixed Feelings

Congratulations to the students in the Grade 11 and 12 vocal music classes who presented at the VSS Virtual Concert: **Mixed Feelings**.

Reflecting the emotional heights and depths associated with the theme, the students wrote about love, heartbreak, friendship, the pandemic, mythical figures, celebrity crushes, and more. They put an amazing amount of love, time, and talent into this project, as they collaborated to create original songs which included powerful lyrics, melodies, tracks and graphics to craft and engaging online concert experience. We are very proud of their accomplishments!

The students are excited to share their work through a YouTube video here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCARKd93I7GaiwJiBG0XzToQ>.

We Have a VSS Club For You!

Please check out the 27+ clubs available to students, led by students at VSS. Find the club for you at the [Club Hub at VSS](#). Clubs range from the Animé Club to the Wellness Club and all 25 in between. Here is one club example:

Black Student Alliance

The [VSS BSA \(Black Student Alliance\)](#) serves to increase student voice, build capacity in student leadership and is supported by TDSB staff members. The BSA seeks to empower Black students, create safer and more inclusive spaces and provide leadership opportunities for students of African Heritage. The BSA is also an ally to all other underrepresented voices.

Check it out at [The Club Hub @ VSS](#).



Putting It All Together in the VSS

Teachers of four different subject areas came together to deliver a cross curricular learning experience about food security in Canada to grade 10 students, which focussed on Toronto during the pandemic.

The class began with two guest speakers - Winnie Quach and Shannon McCauley. Winnie worked on a service-learning pilot project with the City of Toronto on food literacy and food insecurity. Shannon, from Community Food Centres Canada, spoke about what her organization does and how COVID has impacted food security in Toronto. The students had the opportunity to ask questions and put what they learned into action. Students from all four classes collaborated to dive deeper into the issue of food security and the teachers challenged them to examine the problem through their subject lens, and come up with ways to raise awareness and propose solutions to the issue of food security.

Here are some of the students' ideas from the brainstorming activity:

- Have workshops and/or assemblies about Food Security in school
- Breakfast/lunch programs provided at schools and donate to food drives
- Recognition days on the subject - similar to "Bell Let's Talk"
- Spread awareness and petitions to ask politicians to help
- Encourage public events where people can learn about food insecurity and make resources available

The teachers learned a lot by hosting this cross-curricular day and have gathered student feedback to work towards an even better experience in Quad 4.

A few of resources to check out:

[Toronto Youth Cabinet](#)
[Food Insecurity in Toronto](#)
[Community Food Centres Canada | Good food is just the beginning - Home](#)
[UToronto Food Insecurity](#)

Interview With Yi Lin: VSS Student and Vice President of TDSB Student Senate

Yi Lin is a Grade 11 student at Dr. Norman Bethune CI who is attending VSS this year and was recently elected Vice President of the TDSB Student Senate.

What does the TDSB Student Senate do?

The Student Senate is a student governing body. It started in 1999 under the name, "Super Council." The name changed to Student Senate in 2016. We meet regularly as a student group and meet every month with our staff advisor. We represent students from every secondary and middle school in TDSB.

Students from different schools across Toronto attend our monthly learning center meeting to ensure the flow of ideas between the Student Senate and students. We take ideas and concerns from students and then the Student Trustees take these ideas forward to the Board of Education. There are three Student Trustees who sit on the Board of Education.

We plan events and conferences for youth, bringing together students from across Toronto. Our work is highlighted on the [TDSB Student Senate](#) page of the TDSB website.



Why were you interested in joining the Student Senate?

I am passionate about education and making a difference. I know that students have lots of ideas that don't get heard. I want to work with others to bring student ideas forward and ultimately to improve the school board.

Working with the Student Senate, I can be a role model for students in Grade 7 and 8 and help them think about making their voices heard. The Student Senate is a great way to meet people from across Toronto and collaborate on making education better and amplifying students' voices.

How did you get started in student politics?

I started in high school as a Grade 10 representative to my school's student activity council. As a Grade 10 representative, I built my leadership skills by working with other student leaders at my school.

Through this early experience, I gained insight into how students can make a difference. The first step students needed was to make their voice matter and never be afraid to step out of their comfort zone in making a change.

Building on my experience in Grade 10, I ran for the VP role this year. My campaign pitch was, "We matter. Our voices are what ensure changes and improvements can be made to support students here in the TDSB."

What activities are planned for this year?

As a Senate, we hosted a Mental Health Conference, which had happened on Wednesday, April 21 and Thursday, April 22. We invited several guest speakers to host workshops where they talked to students in grades 6 to 12 about the importance of mental health and well-being.

We also successfully advocated for feminine hygiene products to be supplied to TDSB students in schools free of charge. We hope to see this spread province-wide for all school boards.

Finally, I am working with a VSS staff advisor to create a Student Senate Council called the TDSB VSS Senate in Virtual Secondary School to foster student communication. The club is where students can voice their concerns and ideas on various topics surrounding our school. All the ideas shared by the students will be shared with the principals, vice-principals, or superintendents in Virtual School where they can have a sense of what students need to be successful and can better support students' educational needs.

