



# Virtual Schools



## TDSB Virtual Secondary School Family Newsletter

Happy New Year to all Virtual Secondary School families!

While this year is off to a challenging start, we hope that all students and families are managing well under the current circumstances.

We continue to hear about great things happening in classrooms and are impressed by how well students have persevered. On behalf of all Virtual School staff we would also like to thank parents/guardians for your ongoing partnership as we continue to navigate the online learning environment together.

For more information and updates, please visit [www.tdsb.on.ca/virtualschool](http://www.tdsb.on.ca/virtualschool) and follow along on Twitter @tdsbvs.

### Mental Health and Well-Being: Finding Calm

Finding calm in our daily lives can be challenging, especially when we find ourselves online so much to participate in virtual learning. Calmness is an important part of taking care of yourself - taking a moment, or a few, to find some time for ourselves helps refocus our attention and restore our energy.

Here are a few ideas from [School Mental Health Ontario](#) to find calm in your day.

If you have **one minute**:

**Get grounded.** Pause. Feel your feet in your shoes. If seated, lightly push your feet against the floor.

**Recall.** Who is someone that makes you smile? Bring them to mind for a moment or two.

If you have **five minutes**:

**Say thank-you.** Text a friend and thank them for something they did for you.

**Listen.** Have a favourite song that you listen to when relaxing? Press play!

**Be in the moment.** Find a free guided mindfulness/meditation online. Find a style which suits you.

**Tidy up.** Set your timer for 5 minutes and take a break to tidy up your workspace.

If you have **10 minutes**:

**Journal.** Write down 10 things you are thankful for.

**Sip. Savour.** Prepare and enjoy a cup of your favorite tea or other beverage.

**Walk It Out.** Take a stroll around the block.

**Dance.** Have a favourite song that makes you want to move. Press play. Repeat.

If you have **30 minutes or more**:

**Phone A Friend.** Ask them how they are feeling. Share your thoughts and experiences too.

**Sweat.** Walk, run, weights. You choose.

**Stretch It Out.** Find a [free yoga class online](#).

**Laugh.** Watch a funny movie, show or YouTube video.

Check out other [resources to support your mental health and well-being](#).



## TDSB Online Learning: Google Meet & Zoom Safety Features

Student safety is a priority at the TDSB and we are doing everything we can to ensure the security of all online learning sessions and the safety of students and staff while participating.

All TDSB teachers, principals and vice principals are aware of the necessary measures to take while utilizing Google Meet or Zoom web conferencing tools and implement the following security measures to prevent unwanted persons from entering class meetings:

- **Google Meet:** The host/teacher can disable non-TDSB people from entering meetings. They can also disable screen sharing and chat for participants, if necessary.
- **Zoom:** The host/teacher can enable waiting rooms and prevent non-TDSB people from entering meetings. There are also several security controls available (e.g. muting, removing participants, etc.) within the meeting itself.

If a teacher and/or class experiences any security issue during a Google Meet or Zoom session, the Principal and IT Services are notified immediately so that the issue can be investigated and support provided. In this time of online learning, we must all remain diligent and continue to work together to ensure the safety of students and staff.

## Virtual School Staff Directory

Virtual School administrative team directories are available online and are updated on an ongoing basis. A number of new staff have been welcomed to the teams this January. Secondary Vice-Principals have been designated by alpha based on the student's last name.

[Virtual Secondary School](#)

## Optional Attendance for 2021-22

Earlier this month, families were sent an email communication to provide clarification on how to apply for [Optional Attendance](#) under the constraints of the current provincial State of Emergency circumstances. Our adjustments to this process will ensure that all students/families who wish to apply to another school or program for the 2021-2022 school year, are able to do so. [Read More.](#)

## January is Tamil Heritage Month

Tamil Heritage Month is recognized nationally since October 2016, provincially since March 2004 and by the Toronto District School Board since January 2016. The month of January was chosen as it coincides with one of the most important celebrations for Canadians of Tamil heritage, the Thai Pongal harvest festival. Millions of Tamil people around the world irrespective of their religion celebrate Thai Pongal and offer thanks for an abundant harvest.

This year, the chosen theme selected by the volunteer planning committee is உண்மை - உரிமை - ஒற்றுமை: Truth - Rights - Unity. Unmai (உண்மை) recognizes that our lived experiences are our truths and these truths shape our understanding of the world around us. [Learn more.](#)



## Virtual School in the News

[CTV: Toronto arts school transforms annual musical showcase into virtual production](#)

[CBC Metro Morning: Virtual gym class gets creative](#)

## Future Designers Shine in Tech Design Class

This holiday season, grade 11 Technological Design students successfully designed and created 115 small 3D printed holiday toys, which were donated to the Salvation Army's Toy Mountain drive!

Students were tasked with developing designs and working pre-production prototypes of their toys using 3D printers in an entirely virtual environment. They had to adhere to strict size parameters and their toys had to have an articulating joint or part. Although students could not hold and experience their own prints, students were given live feedback on prints through virtual student-teacher conferences.

Ultimately, the project was a success and students created some awesome toys to donate!

## Club Learns All About Website Development

Can you remember the last day you did not access a single website? Probably not. Websites are prominent and critical in our lives and mastering the ability to make your own will put you one step ahead of everyone else.

Club members are encouraged to engage in the processes of inquiry and problem solving with respect to global competencies. Students are taught to realize web platform solutions that could benefit society and learn to develop websites and other online tools and increase their digital literacy, which will serve them well in our

information and technologically driven world. We are now moving toward enlisting moderators to handle questions students may have while working on various projects. We have approximately 120 members and counting!

## Students Helping Students

Help is on the way! More than 60 Peer Tutors have completed dynamic Tutor Facilitation Training offered through the Licence to Learn (L2L) program and will be matched with Grade 9 to 11 students. Benefits of this tutoring include the development of self-confidence, a supportive relationship with an older student and academic support that can contribute to increased success in school. This is an exciting initiative and opportunity for Virtual School students. The expertise and enthusiasm demonstrated by our student leaders is energizing for us all.

To keep the momentum going, the Virtual School is also embarking on a Tutoring Program with University of Toronto. More details to come in Quadmester 3.

For more information about the Peer Tutoring program at the VS please connect with:

[Patricia.Davies@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:Patricia.Davies@tdsb.on.ca))

[Daniel.Chan@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:Daniel.Chan@tdsb.on.ca)

[Shawn.Robertson@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:Shawn.Robertson@tdsb.on.ca)

## Special Education Update

Under the guidance of their teachers, student in the DD program have organized a Yearbook Committee, Dance Club, Equity Club, Disney Club, Art Club, pen-pals between students in different classes, field trips and guest speakers. All of this on their own initiative to enrich our students' experience. To further the variety of the student experiences, classes have joined together, prompting new friendships to develop.



Parents/guardians recognize the extra care and compassion the Special Education teachers show and one parent recently wrote: *“Thank you for always responding promptly to my questions or concerns, no matter how small. You make us feel important. You make my child feel like he belongs here.”*

A teacher wrote: *“I had a heartwarming phone call with a parent last week. The student’s mother said, with deep sincerity, that she is immensely grateful for teachers, especially during these challenging times. The mother went on to say she appreciates all of the hard work teachers are doing and the care they show towards students succeeding in VSS. That conversation truly made my week.”*

### Honouring the Individual, Creating Safe Spaces

The Gender and Sexuality Alliance has been meeting since November to foster virtual community for 2SLGBTQ+ students, staff, and allies. Serving the 17,000 students of the Virtual Secondary School, the GSA has affinity groups for students based on interest (activism, arts, book club, faith, gaming, and wellness) and identity (disability, fem, questioning, students of colour, trans/non-binary/genderqueer). The GSA has a number of events planned for members and for all secondary students in the TDSB, including guest speakers on sexual health, activism, and art. Plans for the year also include virtual Pride events. Information, resources, and links to meetings can be found on the VSS GSA website at [sites.google.com//tdsb.on.ca/vssgsa/](https://sites.google.com//tdsb.on.ca/vssgsa/).

Recent goings-on in the GSA include a whole club meeting with games and information for students on how to change their names in the virtual environment. The activism group is currently learning about racism, white supremacy, and how to combat them. The arts group is

currently creating posters to advertise the GSA, and Book Club is reading *A Two-Spirit Journey* by Ma-Nee Chacaby and Mary Louisa Plummer.

### Honouring the Stars

The students in this NAC10-D2 class: “Expressions of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Cultures” wrote some very imaginative and touching stories when studying the Creation of Stars by Indigenous people. They came up with their own creative representations.

### Peaceful Summer Night

Stars shine bright  
As diamonds in the sky.  
Stars dance all night long  
Like a bird flapping its wings.

Stars wink at the Moon  
Like the ocean waves to the Sun.  
The moon shines down  
As silver in the night sky.

The moon brightens at the Sun  
Like gold glimmers in the sand.  
The Sun glides gracefully  
As a swan swimming.

The Sun blushes when the Ocean  
Shows the Sun’s reflection  
As bright as sparkly snow.  
The ocean gently whispers  
Into my ear like a seashell.

--Sajith