



# Virtual Schools



## TDSB Virtual Secondary School Family Newsletter

Welcome to the March 2021 issue of the Virtual School newsletter. We hope that you are finding this monthly publication a good source of information and updates to help with staying informed about what's happening not only in the Virtual School but across the TDSB.

As you know, the Ministry of Education delayed the March Break so we are now looking forward to an upcoming break from April 12 to 16. We hope that all students and families enjoy some down time, as this has been a busy and challenging year for everyone.

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

## Supporting Mental Health and Well-being During the COVID Anniversary

The week of March 11 marked the one-year anniversary of COVID-19, of a global pandemic that has forever changed our lives. It has been a challenging year and we have faced great uncertainty and tremendous changes. The pandemic highlighted social inequities forging critical conversations about anti-oppression. Although we recognize the stress and weight of the pandemic, we also recognize the strengths, the building of community and our perseverance.

The changes and challenges in schooling that have resulted for our children allow us to reflect on how we have endured such times with resilience, compassion and care for one another and ourselves.

[Read the full message from the Director of Education and Associate Directors.](#)

## REMINDER: Change to March Break Dates

The Ministry of Education has delayed March Break. The break is now from **April 12 – 16, 2021**.

## Quad 3 Communication of Student Achievement

While there is no formal midterm report card for Quad 3, during the week of March 22-26, teachers communicated with students and families to provide the current mark.

There will not be *formal* parent/guardian-teacher conferences. However, parents/guardians are invited to set up a mutually convenient time to discuss student progress between March 29 and April 1. Please contact your child's teacher(s) via email to arrange a time.

## Director's Annual Report

The Director's Annual Report 2020 highlights important work that occurred across the TDSB last year and progress made on the Multi-Year Strategic Plan. [Read the report online.](#)

## Toronto Public Health (TPH) Vaccine Update

As the vaccine rollout happens across the City of Toronto, please [visit the TPH website](#) to learn more.



### New Outdoor Learning Website

Getting outside safely is more important now than ever. To help students, families and staff get the most out of the outdoors in a safe and educational way, the TDSB has launched a new outdoor learning website. [Explore the new site today!](#)

### Ontario Secondary Student Literacy Test (OSSLT) Update

This year, the EQAO is field testing a new online Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). Participation in this field test is not mandatory & the TDSB has decided not to participate. [Learn more here.](#)

### TDSB Conversation Series

Families are invited to join us for a series of engaging and informative conversations on topics we heard you want to learn more about. Hear from leading experts and participate in question and answer sessions online.

[Visit the website for dates and details about upcoming sessions.](#)

### Human Rights Annual Report

The TDSB recently released its first-ever Human Rights Annual Report. To read the report, report an incident, access policies and procedures and read a Q&A, [visit the Human Rights website.](#)

### TDSB Celebrates Greek Heritage Month

March is Greek Heritage Month at the Toronto District School Board. It is an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the many achievements and contributions of Greek Canadians to Canada, and an occasion to mark and enjoy the history of Greek culture. [Learn more.](#)

The theme for this year is:  
1821-2021

**Freedom and Unity – Ελευθερία και Ενότητα**  
**Learning From Our Roots...Shaping Our Future**

### News from the Guidance Team

#### Post-Secondary Reminders

- Students who have applied to Ontario Colleges or Universities are advised to regularly log in to their online application on the [OCAS website](#) or [OUAC website](#) to review their academic information on file with OCAS or OUAC. If changes are required, students are advised to contact the VSS Guidance Team using the [Virtual Secondary School OCAS/OUAC Account Issues Google Form.](#)
- If you have applied to a college or university outside of Ontario and require assistance with your application, please connect with your home school guidance counsellor. The *Mident* number for the TDSB Virtual School is 936990 if colleges or universities outside of Ontario are requesting that information from you.

#### Quad 3 Full Disclosure Date for Grade 11 and 12 Courses

- Reminder for students enrolled in Grade 11 and 12 courses at VSS that the Full Disclosure Date for Quad 3 is **Tuesday, April 6, 2021.**
- If a student is enrolled in a Grade 11 or 12 courses that they wish to drop and do not want the course to appear on their official transcript, they must withdraw from (drop) the course by Tuesday, April 6, 2021, 3 p.m. If a student in a Grade 11 or 12 course withdraws from the course after the full disclosure date, the course will appear on their official transcript, with whatever their current mark was on the date they withdrew, along with a W (withdrawal)



beside it.

- To withdraw from (drop) a course, students must connect with their OSR (home) school

Guidance Counsellor and request to be withdrawn from the course. If a student is under 18, their parent/guardian will need to contact the OSR (home) school Guidance Counsellor to approve the withdrawal.

### VSS Administrators Join Virtual Classes

VSS administrators often drop into classes, as they did with in-person classes. One administrator shared the following experience:

“I’ve had the opportunity to visit my teacher colleagues’ classrooms. The experiences ranged from engaged students texting in the chat spaces to well-researched and organised group presentations on volcanic activity in Hawaii, earthquakes in Pakistan and climate change.

I noted the challenges faced in the virtual environment but saw teachers rise to the occasion and master the technology to offer seamless learning experiences for students.

### Mindfest

The Family Studies Department promoted *Mindfest* (March 8-12), an annual event organized by the Psychiatry Department at the University of Toronto to promote mental health in Secondary and Post Secondary students. This year the workshops ran entirely online, with topics focussing on the struggle to maintain mental health during the pandemic. View an online recording of Dr. Kenneth’s Fung talk here: [Cultivating Resilience and Joy during the pandemic](#).

### Co-Op at VSS: Real World, Online

Students are enjoying placements from a multitude of fields in Cooperative Education at VSS. They are refining their communication skills and continuing to develop confidence and capacity to build relationships while creating their resumes. Some of the exciting careers being explored include: teacher assistant, clerical assistant in health fields, journalism, financial analysis, non-profit work, interior design, environmental sciences, transportation, law enforcement, and inquiry into construction and design. Teachers consistently report that the student supervisors are impressed with the dedication and commitment students demonstrate. Well done!

One of the most challenging areas to place Co-Op students in virtually has been the trades but with a bit of creativity, a Co-op teacher worked with an Auto Teacher to develop the “Co-Op Transportation Experience” to meet the needs of students interested in the transportation sector.

In its second quad, the Transportation Experience has expanded to include weekly guest speakers, including the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, specialized TDSB auto programs, Centennial College programs, and the City of Toronto Fleet Services. The students in the program come from a variety of Transportation backgrounds and are all engaged as they choose the modules and topics to learn more about.

During a year where everything changed, students and teachers adapted, refined, re-imagined, and developed new strategies to make cooperative education accessible and exciting in an online world and this will continue in the future for students who engage in Co-Op!



### DD Department Celebrates “March Fake”

The first ever in-school March Break known as "March Fake" included pyjama day, jersey day, a celebration of St. Paddy's Day, silly hat day, and a beach day and dance party on Friday. The department had a dance-off among the three morning greetings groups and the students were highly engaged and had a lot of fun!

### Hospitality goes to Duck Cooking School

As part of our VSS culinary program, teacher Michael Varty has arranged relevant virtual field trips for his class. On March 19, hospitality students attended a virtual demonstration of Duck Cooking with Chris Conzellmann of King Cole Ducks in Stouffville. The focus of the enthusiastic presentation was Local, Ethical, and Sustainable Farming. Hospitality's online format is an excellent environment for achieving the theoretical expectations of the course that are often hard to succeed in the kitchen setting.

Through these guided, virtual tours, students are engaged in dynamic and interactive activities. Students gain real-life experiences in a virtual environment, from having a Chef demo kitchen where they do online cooking to conversations with industry partners.

### Speaking of food...

Students may be at home, but they still get to experience food labs! While they take a few different forms, and safety is always the priority, students in the Family Studies Foods programs (HFN, HFC and HFA) still get to be part of their cooking show. Vegan snacks, pizza, international foods have all been attempted over the year. There is lots of flexibility in what students prepare with our grand goal of encouraging healthy, home food preparation and nutritious eating!

### Special Education Department Plans Ahead

The VSS Special Education Department is passionate about supporting students with unique learning needs and students have various talents, including coding, podcasting, visual arts, dance, and music.

The department's current focus areas are student wellness, equity, self-advocacy, and transitions and they are also looking to provide sessions for Grades 11 and 12 learners about post-secondary pathways. Representatives from Sheridan College and York University will be speaking about supports and accommodations available at post-secondary institutions for students with Learning Disabilities, Autism Spectrum and/or physical disabilities.

Special Education teachers are committed to supporting students' success! Learning Strategies classes provide students with ongoing, creative ways to show their learning. Mindful that most of our learners will be transitioning back to in-person school in September, we intentionally build students' self-esteem and self-advocacy skills. Knowledge is power!

We continue to encourage learners to do their best as partners in their education at VSS.

### VSS Debate & Public Speaking Club

Since October 2020, a dream to engage students and help give students a voice in this time of lockdown was born. The goal was a Debate & Public Speaking Club and through the VSS announcements and word of mouth advertising by teachers, the club launched with 180 students! Many dedicated teachers also stepped forward and the club has grown to an impressive 300 students!

The club offers multiple styles of self-expression.



Our first offerings in the club have been the British Parliamentary/Canadian Parliamentary Debate and Model United Nations Debate. Since October, we have run three Model UN Conferences and two British Parliamentary Debate tournaments. Our TDSB VSS Model UN students recently won four (!) awards at the Scarborough U of T Model United Nations Conference (SMC). The club's British Parliamentary debaters also competed at the Halifax Warriors Cup, where we submitted ten teams! We also run multiple workshops and seminars with our team of teacher advisors and outside mentors from U of T and Queen's University Debate Unions. Students aren't just surviving but *thriving!*

The club has elected a full slate of student leaders who have taken up an enormous workload and the responsibility to draft our club Constitution and Equity policy and expand the Public Speaking arm of the club into offering three new styles of public speaking: Toastmasters, the Munk Debates, and Spoken Word.

Reflections from Teacher Advisors:

*"We hope that when face-to-face in-person school resumes, this club can reach out to schools that don't have debate teacher advisors. Maybe this is the start of something big!"*

– Mark Woo

*"The energy and enthusiasm that the students bring Debate make Virtual School that much better every week. Hearing their arguments, watching their growth in every tournament reminds me that our students are creative and profound, witty and most resilient."*

- Debbie Lerech

## Reaching for the Top Club

Virtual School has hosted its own Reach for the Top Club this year.

Canada has a long history with Reach for the Top. In 1961, British Columbia's CBC affiliate created the program, basing it on the UK's *Top of the Form* show. CBC hosted the show and it grew in popularity. Alex Trebek even hosted the Toronto program for a few years. Across the country, families would tune in weekly to watch high school teams answer challenging questions. The team with the highest number of points wins.

The VSS Reach for the Top (RFTT) Club has been an excellent experience for 200 students and eight staff who created the RFTT Team in January. Staff sponsor Mr. Goldberg placed the students from all grade levels into 32 teams - 16 senior and 16 intermediate. The teams then completed the largest intramural round-robin tournament in *Reach for the Top* history—104 games in total, running about 15 games per week.

As of mid-March, playoffs are finished and a closing ceremony will take place complete with speeches, virtual awards and a trivia *Kahoot!* that was prepared by a teacher. This idea came from a student participant, who will speak at the event.