



# Virtual Schools



## TDSB Virtual Secondary School Family Newsletter

Quadmester 2 began a few weeks ago and is going well. Students continue to show incredible commitment, flexibility and adaptability and thanks to our incredible teachers, we continue to move forward and are seeing positive learning outcomes.

With the Winter Break just around the corner, we hope that all TDSB students and families have an opportunity to rest and remain safe and healthy.

We will see everyone back in January!

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

### Administrative Updates

The day-to-day operations of a school serving 17,000 students requires a strong and sustainable leadership team that can be responsive to students and families.

Below is the updated list of vice principals, including 12 new vice principals that began interim assignments for the duration of the school year, by student surname:

A - Zaheer Bhyat  
 B - Lascelles Grant  
 C - Meredith Tuck  
 D/E - Michael Hawes  
 F/G - Al Karim  
 H - Anant Sukhram  
 I/J - Qaiser Ahmad  
 K - Christine Lee  
 L - Anjali Bajaj  
 M - Tino Barkas  
 N/O - Sima Naymark  
 P - Craig Haid  
 Q/R - Stephen Masson  
 S (Gr. 9/10) - Terrol Sinclair  
 S (Gr. 11/12) - Kathleen Pyper  
 T/U - Shawn Robertson  
 V/W - Marcia McCurdy-Fagan  
 X/Z - Ross Murray

In December, we welcomed Centrally Assigned Principal Linda Edwards to the Virtual School (elementary and secondary) to support French as a Second Language. We also welcomed additional office staff.

### Toronto Public Health (TPH) & TDSB

Now more than ever it is important to focus on wellness and mental health. Please view the [TPH resource document](#) that provides helpful links to TPH web pages for physical activity, nutrition and mental health resources.

#### [TPH Covid-19: Holiday Guide](#)

Visit the TDSB for additional [Mental Health and Well-Being Resources](#).

### Student Success

The Student Success Team works each day to contact students and families to help resolve attendance issues and follow-up with students and their families who were unsuccessful in the last quadmester. Our goal is to ensure that a plan is in place for students to achieve increased success in current and future courses.

The team recently completed professional learning on understanding and building community. They examine data about students, considered innovative ways to teach and assess, and how to intentionally foster community to support student achievement and well-being.



The team will continue to co-facilitate professional learning opportunities in Equity and Anti-Oppression and is working on a website with resources for students.

Contact the Student Success Team:

[Natalie.Bacchus@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:Natalie.Bacchus@tdsb.on.ca) (Curriculum Leader, Student Success, Grades 11 and 12)

[Rebecca.Roach@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:Rebecca.Roach@tdsb.on.ca) (Curriculum Leader, Student Success, Grades 9 and 10)

### Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA)

In late November, the TDSB Virtual Secondary School launched its Gender and Sexuality Alliance, an extracurricular group for 2SLGBTQIA+ students to find community and support while learning online. Spearheaded by almost 30 staff members from the VSS, as well as those in central roles that support youth, our first meeting was a resounding success, with 80+ students turning out for our live YouTube welcome session and over 200 students expressing interest through our survey!

The VSS GSA is open to all secondary students learning virtually as well as in-school students. Students are welcome to join Student Group Sessions based on their identities (2-Spirit, Black, Trans and Non-Binary, and more) and by interest (STEM, Book Club, Activism, Gaming, Wellness). We look forward to holding more events throughout the school year.

[Learn more about the TDSB VSS GSA.](#)

### Health and Physical Education

The Health and Physical Education (HPE) Department has had a tremendous start with Virtual Secondary School. They have

collaborated and shared numerous ideas and resources to enhance the online HPE program and have received resources for Wellness Breaks for students. The team has asked for student feedback and is in the process of creating clubs and fitness programs for students and their families. The creation of a communication forum amongst staff has made it possible to achieve our goal of continuing to provide as much support to students as possible.

### Canadian and World Studies

On Friday, December 4, many history classes participated in the Virtual Youth Forum, "Giants of Africa." This event featured conversations with young activists who shared personal stories, insights and experiences. Speakers included Masai Ujiri (President of the Toronto Raptors), P.K Subban (hockey player, Olympian and philanthropist) and many others. The event was moderated by Kayla Grey, TSN reporter and anchor. What an incredible experience for our students!

### English Department News

Despite the challenges of adapting to a new learning platform in virtual school, what has become apparent is the power and ingenuity of our students' voices. In one teacher's ENG4U classes, anti-Black racism and resistance in Canada has been the focus, while also developing the usual English curriculum skills of reading, writing, media analysis and creation, and oral communication. The classes have investigated the origins of social construction of race, the impact of anti-Black racism on Canadians past and present, and developed an understanding of what it means to be anti-racist. For their final project, students created a podcast that examined the existence



of racism in their communities and proposed concrete pathways for change. True to the media form, students included an introduction to the topic, music, interviews, reflection, and persuasive techniques.

“I was blown away,” said teacher Kristin Kniehl. “Once again I was reminded of why I became a teacher in the first place: because young people are inspiring. Their inquiry, passion, and insight demonstrated why we need to centre the voices of youth in our classrooms and beyond. They truly are the future.”

### English Class Connects with Podcasters and Actors Across the GTA and Canada

During the last few weeks of Quadmester 1, Mr. Doe's Grade 10 English class studied the importance of Podcasts in society. Students explored podcasts on a variety of subjects and also met (virtually) with local GTA/Canadian podcasters to discuss the importance of communicating, listening, and connecting in 2020. Guest speakers included Diva Day, a local organization which empowers young menstruators by eliminating barriers to education and using arts-based techniques to cultivate community and provide a platform for female and gender-marginalized voices and stories. As well, students met virtually with arts educator Rob Kempson, who discussed his journey to create meaningful virtual content for the Shaw Festival. Local actor Tyler Chek (Let's Grab Coffee Podcast) also provided "hands-on" demonstrations on how to create a live podcast. It was a great success and students thoroughly enjoyed connecting with artists and educators.

### Family Studies



The Family Studies Department has been offering a number of hands-on activities to students, such as cooking and sewing. Studying from home has its advantages when learning home economics.

Pictured here are pizzas made by Ms. Gupta with her Grade 10 Food and Nutrition class.

### Music in the Virtual Secondary School

Music is thriving in the Virtual Secondary School! Students in strings courses are using web-based recording technology to layer audio from a 2020 news story with recordings of them playing instruments. They are having rich discussions about the valuable role music is playing in helping people around the world stay connected through this pandemic.

In Keyboard classes, when students play and sing for each other, their performance is followed by so much positivity and support from peers. It's inspiring!

Guitar students have been performing solo recitals and improvisations live online, and they are enjoying having a platform to perform.

Grade 10 Music and Computers students are embarking on the Hip Hop Sonnet Project. Combining the bard's words with the rhythms of today, students are creating their own beats in Soundtrap and recording Shakespearean rap!

Grade 12 Vocal Music students are writing, recording, and producing original songs. It's so uplifting to see how they are celebrating and



supporting each other's work. The grade 12 classes have invited the grade 9 and 10 Vocal Music classes to join them in the creation of a Virtual Choir video – stay tuned!

### Pandemic Poetry

We invite you to read some of the [Pandemic Poetry Collection](#) by Ms. Paolone's and Ms. Harris's students from last quadmester.

### ESL Department Update

The Virtual Secondary School (VSS) ESL Department is committed to helping all ESL and International students succeed.

An ESL Club Connections was recently launched for students to connect with guidance counsellors and other students to share experiences and to get to know one another.

Many thanks to the guidance, support and encouragement of the different administrative staff, teachers and supporting staff. Here's a [short thank you video](#) in 31 languages.

### Files from Computer Studies

Computer Studies is off to a productive start in Quadmester 2 with over 20 classes! Students now have the opportunity to learn computer programming. Through courses and a new Virtual Computer Club with over 400 students already, we are expanding access to these useful problem-solving skills to all students across the TDSB.

Students are learning how to program in some of the most popular programming languages in the field today such as Java, Python and Javascript as well as some App development projects. In our club and in our courses, we are gearing up and excitedly preparing for the University of Waterloo Canadian Computing

Competition in February. Preparing for and writing this competition gives students a chance to hone their problem solving and algorithm design skills. We look forward to an exciting year ahead of Computer Studies!

### Business News - Entrepreneur Club

The first Entrepreneur Club meeting was hosted in early December. This club is for any/all students who have a passion for starting their own business (arts & crafts, jewelry making, t-shirt designs, graphic art, etc.) and who are seeking guidance and mentorship from our staff experts.

With 82 students attending, this student club aims to foster a sense of entrepreneurship, self-reliance and start up prowess.

For future meetings and events, students can contact [Michael.Brown@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:Michael.Brown@tdsb.on.ca).

### Reach for the Top - Student Club

**Reach for the Top** is (now) an online fast-paced, **team-based trivia game**, where teams of four face each other in a Zoom room, trying to buzz in the fastest to answer trivia questions, using an online buzzer system. The questions can be about school related topics or pop culture. It's also fun!

To join our **Reach for the Top** intramural league, fill out this quick [survey](#). No experience is necessary. You can create a team of four (4) or we'll create a team for you.

Reach for the Top is played in two divisions: intermediate (Grade 9 & 10 students) and senior (Grade 11 & 12 students).



For more information or to ask questions, contact VSS Business Studies teacher at [michael.goldberg@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:michael.goldberg@tdsb.on.ca).

### Post-Secondary Pathways and Funding

Families and students are invited to join us on Wednesday December 16, 2020 at 6 p.m. for a presentation on Post-Secondary Pathways and Funding. This workshop will discuss the post-secondary pathways and cover a wide variety of ways to fund your future post-secondary endeavours (grants, bursaries, scholarships, OSAP, etc.). Space is limited due to Zoom capacity limits.

To attend, please click on the Zoom link here: <https://bit.ly/3g4B6vC>

### Virtual School Therapy Dog Visit

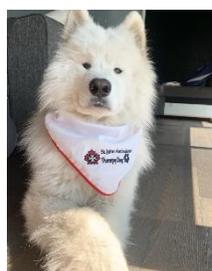
As we enter December, the winter blues are upon us. With two weeks to go until the holiday break, this is a common time for students and staff to struggle with the dark, cold days, especially during a pandemic. In an effort to assist students through this time, teachers organized a fun and interactive session with the St. John Ambulance Therapy Dogs.

Fifteen handlers and their dogs logged into four different sessions to meet with TDSB students and bring some happiness and light into their day. Thank you to Curriculum Leader Ali Meilach for organizing this opportunity!

Among the favorites were:



Buddy the golden retriever who has been busy making virtual visits at several facilities and special visits with schools and other organizations. He also makes window visits with his senior friends.



Koda the Samoyed – ever the social butterfly - loves people and other dogs. And Winter is his thing! Unlike most of us, he loves the snow and cold!



Who could resist the pug faces of Pumpkin and Jagger? Pumpkin is a regular at Sick Kids Hospital (pre-pandemic) and Jagger also visits with stressed out passengers at Pearson airport (pre-pandemic).

It was evident from all the student questions and comments that they enjoyed the visit and interaction with the dogs and handlers.