



## **Student Voice at the Heart of the RCCDSB**

The Renfrew County Catholic District School Board wants to hear students' perspectives about their education and organized an opportunity for them to voice their opinions.

Students in Grades 6 to 12 from across the board gathered on Wednesday May 2 at Best Western Inn, Pembroke, and Wednesday May 9 at Days Inn Renfrew to share their thoughts.

"The goal was to bring students together and grant them an opportunity to discuss and share their voice regarding the four areas of the Board's strategic plan," said Sandra Brannan, RCCDSB Coordinator of Safe Schools. The four pillars of the Board's strategic plan are: Dignity and Belonging, Achievement and Potential, Integrity and Witness, and Wholeness and Wellness.

Both days began with some ice breaker and team-building activities to allow students to get acquainted. "Once the students were pumped and feeling comfortable with their groups, we tackled the first set of questions around the topic of 'Dignity and Belonging,' noted Brannan.

Each group was led by a senior student leader from high school. "As a leader, I guided students in my group and got them to share their opinions. I encouraged everyone to participate because everyone's opinion matters. We worked together to try to make our schools better," said Damian Wierzbicki, Grade 11, St. Joseph's High School, Renfrew.

Throughout the day, students shared their ideas on a variety of topics including engaging tasks, digital citizenship, their Catholic school experience, and feeling safe and content at school.

It was fun talking to new people she will see again in high school, said Grace Howard, a Grade 7 student from St. James Catholic Elementary School in Eganville. "We talked about what we would change, how we feel about learning, our feelings of belonging and inclusiveness, and using technology in the classroom."

In between each series of questions related to the strategic plan, students engaged in small or whole-group team-building exercises and challenges. "It was amazing to see how teams grew and worked together in such a short period of time," stated Brannan.

Senior students recognized another benefit for the younger students who will soon join them at high school. “The activities allow younger kids to bond with older students so they’re not intimidated by high school. High school is not scary!” said Jacob Zekron, Grade 10, St. Joseph’s High School.

They were two wonderful days concluded Brannan. “We are very fortunate to bring these students together and learn from them. Their insight and thoughtfulness was incredible.”

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