

Catholic Youth Weekend Retreat and Board-wide Respect Presentation

About the project ...

Students, staff, a priest and community partners from the Northeastern Catholic District School Board planned a weekend retreat for a group of student leaders as a means of developing spiritual awareness and deepening the partnerships among the students and board, parish and diocese staff concerning Catholic character development initiatives. Many of the school, board and parish leaders shared their personal faith journeys with the students, which provided an authentic opportunity to reflect together and individually about how to live their faith in a secular world. Relationships were further deepened during faith-based discussions about equity, community and student engagement.

The retreat was followed by a board-wide presentation to more than 600 students in grades 6 to 12. A keynote speaker addressed issues of equity and safe schools and the key messages of the presentation inspired the students to both expect respect and respect others. The presentation was based on Catholic values and referenced Scripture with a focus on accepting self and others, valuing diversity and creating a positive school climate.

Impact on student learning and school culture ...

- The retreat contributed to improved student learning by providing an opportunity for students and adults to reflect together on the high school experience and to consider ways of managing stress.
- The retreat also confirmed the importance of having systems of support for students as part of their faith journeys.
- The board-wide presentation's focus on equity and safe schools messages supported the positive, safe and inclusive school climates that are foundational to student learning and success.

Lessons learned for moving forward ...

- The retreat provided an opportunity to showcase the talents of many staff members, leading to an affirmation that the board has the internal capacity to guide and assist students in their spiritual and character development. Based on the success of the retreat, the possibility of having all year-end trips and retreats follow this model is being examined.
- In a small board with only one high school and one main feeder school, bringing students together as often as possible strengthens the ties between the schools and helps create a sense of comfort and belonging for all students.