

St. Gregory Catholic School

Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic District School Board Powassan, Ontario

CONTACT INFORMATION

Principal: Mike Courchesne
Phone: 705-724-3482
Email: courchem@npsc.edu.on.ca
Website: <http://www.npsc.edu.on.ca/schools/stgregory.html>

Mailing Address:

St. Gregory Catholic School
152 Fair View Lane
Powassan, ON
POH 1Z0



About the school ...

St. Gregory is a Junior Kindergarten to Grade 8 school in Powassan, a small town nestled in the Almaguin Highlands near Lake Nipissing. All of St. Gregory's students (261 in the present year) are bused in from outlying communities, many of them facing economic difficulties.

The school has a positive reputation in the communities it serves not only for the academic progress it has made in recent years but also for its spirit of inclusiveness – “We envelop our students with ‘eye hugs’, commented one teacher. “I’m not sure if it’s the country setting,” reflects the custodian, “but the children are so helpful. They help me with my work but they also help with our special needs students.” Caring for one another is the foundation for joint work, with all staff members taking ownership for all of the students in the school. Once they have determined what each child needs in order to improve, they put in place the resources and strategies to ensure success, working with a full range of community partners (e.g., The Learning Partnership, the Nipissing Health Unit, the local OPP). In the words of a teacher, “We ensure that all students experience success with daily tasks – we use different approaches to make sure this success happens.”

Some Snapshots

Students ...

- set targets for improvement, join the Homework Club for extra support and are involved in their own assessments
- support the Student Council (representation from every classroom) and undertake fundraising (e.g., Hockey-thon, Food Bank drive)
- serve as Peer Helpers for Kindergarten students and as Reading Buddies and help the custodian with clean-up and recycling
- enjoy team sports, play days, spirit and fun days and spaghetti dinners

Parents ...

- support a very active Catholic School Activity Council
- take advantage of strategies and resources to support teacher practice and extend learning
- participate in literacy nights, help assemble primary literacy kits to help struggling students and student success rewards
- enjoy class and school newsletters

Twenty-five per cent of the student body is identified as exceptional through the IPRC process and all are integrated into classrooms. “The school has developed strategies to increase student confidence,” explains a teacher. “We use a team approach to interact throughout the day with our exceptional students and then we share our observations and monitor each student’s progress.” Another comments, “When a student is ‘having a day’ we all notice and pitch in together.”

Ongoing improvement ...

With between 83 and 86 per cent of Grade 6 students achieving at or above the provincial standard in all assessment areas, the school’s commitment to higher levels of student learning and achievement is evident. There have been significant increases in Grade 3 and 6 EQAO results in all assessment areas over the last five years. In Grade 3 assessments 93 per cent of the students achieved the provincial standard in writing, 96 per cent in mathematics and 74 per cent in reading. The work of the school over time has resulted in higher levels of student success.

Success after struggle ...

St. Gregory staff invested a significant amount of time in developing a school vision. They began by creating a profile of the “ideal St. Gregory student” and then extended the exercise to include teaching staff, support staff, parents and community partners. Each group developed specific expectations to support the implementation of roles and responsibilities. The school visioning exercise has met with positive results, contributing to an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding and leading to increased collaboration of all school community members. All concerns are heard and addressed, allowing everyone to have ownership in what happens at the school, fostering an environment where “I can go to any teacher in this school, ask for help and know that I’ll teach better as a result. We help each other to make things work.”

St. Gregory’s full school community was involved in a year’s study prior to the implementation of a balanced day timetable that led to improvements in instructional practice by creating large uninterrupted blocks of teaching/learning time and minimizing disruptions and transitions. In the principal’s words, “We discussed our five-year plan as a staff, we talked about what we wanted our school to look like and how the balanced day could create opportunities for student achievement, then we met with all stakeholders and reached common agreement and understanding about where we are going.” The changes have created increased time for teacher collaboration and for teacher and student participation in extracurricular activities.

Teaching, learning and leading ...

Assessment for learning. DRA is used in conjunction with other assessment tools and strategies each term to set learning goals for individual students. Progress is monitored at divisional meetings, strategies are modified and students who have achieved targets are identified and celebrated. Class targets are set by the full-school staff each term.

Class groupings. The resource teacher and literacy partner take groups of students so that each teacher has smaller groups, with targeted students receiving focused individual or small group instruction. All primary teachers focus on the same writing form and reading strategies, incorporating a common “big idea.” This regrouping of students can be challenging and time consuming, yet the benefits are obvious. Students demonstrate greater ownership of their work, are actively involved in the sessions and are excited about learning. Students



with higher needs are empowered and demonstrate significant improvements in reaching their potential. In the words of a teacher, “We struggled with doing guided reading with only one pair of hands, so we discussed this as a team and developed a timetable for greater access to guided reading opportunities.”

Community leadership team. St. Gregory’s school community leadership team includes representatives from each division as well as the principal, resource teacher and literacy partner. They meet regularly to review the school vision, focus on individual students and develop strategies for improvement. They also determine professional learning opportunities for all staff to move the vision and focus forward. At the system level, the school’s SMART goals are aligned with board goals and the strategies of the School Effectiveness Framework. The team networks with teams from other schools to plan the implementation of high-yield strategies. This promotes cross-school sharing of best practices, such as language rotation groups, school-wide anchor charts and consistent assessment strategies, including teacher moderation.

“Our teachers recognize each child individually. They teach the whole class but they work with every single child.” *Parent*

“In September, we ask our parents to write a small note about what they want the school to know about their child, and this establishes rapport.” *Teacher*

“Our measure of who we are is how well our exceptional students experience success.” *Principal*

Moving into the future

- ◆ extend the teaching-learning critical pathways to include the whole school and plan more “big idea” learning, especially with the Junior division
- ◆ examine mathematics instruction across divisions to learn strategies for differentiation
- ◆ learn more about using technology, such as SMART Boards, portable labs, Kurzweil stations and a range of web-based resources to support individual students and achieve classroom goals