

Discovering Your Possibilities

About the project ...

The *Discovering Your Possibilities* (DYP) project provided opportunities for students to re-engage in learning and helped them develop leadership, teamwork, problem-solving and resiliency skills with the goal of increased academic engagement and success. The program connected closely with the board's Catholic Character Development initiative and included a monthly focus on the Catholic virtues. In September, Grade 10 to 12 students from across the board who were identified as potentially at risk of not graduating were invited to an information session about the program. The session included expectations for participation – 160 students wanted to participate and signed a contract agreeing to the expectations. The activities began in October and were held monthly, each focused on a Catholic virtue. Throughout the program, twenty Faculty of Kinesiology and Education students from the University of Windsor served as mentors for the secondary student participants. The university student mentors worked with teachers from various high schools to promote student success by addressing issues of re-engagement and belonging at school. Many of the activities took place outdoors to foster respect and appreciation for the environment and to promote a sense of inclusion within the larger community. The activities included leadership camps, service work with seniors and academic support prior to exams. The culminating activity was a Challenge Event at the University of Windsor and a celebration ceremony for the DYP program graduates.

Impact on student learning and school culture ...

- The activities provided opportunities for students identified as at-risk of not graduating to get to know university students and to share challenges, take risks, develop solutions and work together to achieve common outcomes.
- Recreational outdoor activities provided students with opportunities to engage in a non-intimidating environment, which promoted enthusiasm and self-confidence.
- Students learned teamwork and cooperation as they participated in activities with their peers and mentors.
- The activities and mentoring opportunities fostered community building and inclusion and connected the students with positive and supportive role models.
- The students involved in the activities generally were not involved in any other school-based activities and benefited from the re-engagement opportunities.

Lessons learned for moving forward ...

- The board will continue its focus on introducing re-engagement strategies and promoting character development for all students.
- The importance of creating opportunities for mentorship and leadership development for the students identified as at-risk was evident as students thrived on the interaction and activities, supported by their mentors.
- The importance of having caring adults involved in the lives of students potentially at-risk was also evident as student self-confidence and engagement increased as they were involved in the activities.