

# Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha Catholic School

## Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board Hamilton, Ontario

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### About the school ...

Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha is a Catholic elementary school of about 270 students in the city of Hamilton. The school represents a diverse community of learners, with a number of students speaking a language other than English at home.

Staff underscore that it is their responsibility as teachers to prepare students for the world beyond the school walls and to ensure that high expectations and academic challenges are part of every student's life. They believe in early learning and success, beginning in Junior Kindergarten. Throughout the grades the school's data collection and analysis process assists teachers in monitoring each student's progress. This information in turn motivates them to provide immediate and targeted instruction and support based on the student's needs. In one teacher's words, "Everybody in this school wants the same thing – namely, that each child who walks through the door will meet with success." This devoted staff has high expectations for all, seeks out support when it is needed and encourages students to set goals for themselves.

### Some Snapshots

#### Students ...

- are surveyed regularly to provide direction on topics/issues/interests
- can articulate what they are doing, why they are doing it and how to support each other in small group work
- serve as reading mentors to younger students, creating a community of readers where reading is "cool"

#### Parents ...

- are pleased to see their children applying new skills as critical listeners/problem solvers in their home environment
- appreciate that some selected information is translated into a variety of languages
- work with staff and the School Council to welcome new families and organize Movie Nights, Literacy Nights and Numeracy Nights where families can share food as well as learning

### Ongoing improvement ...

On the 2005-06 assessment, most results were below 50 per cent of the students at or above the provincial standard. The recent efforts of the school are reflected in the significant improvement in all EQAO assessments. Student achievement is remarkable, with between 85 and 89 per cent of students achieving at or above the provincial standard in five assessment areas. The only exception is in Grade 6 mathematics, although achievement has increased by 29 percentage points since 2004-05.

### Success after struggle ...

Effective and efficient team communication became a priority at Blessed Kateri. Staff shared resources and approaches and began to use consistent language with students. For example, they taught reading comprehension strategies much more explicitly and modelled metacognition skills across grade levels and subject areas. The effect on students was increasingly evident, encouraging staff to continue on their learning journey.

Staff learned how to focus their meetings and professional learning times differently – to move from talk about operations, mechanics and management to focused professional conversation about teaching and learning, with an emphasis on action and classroom implementation. Gradually, there was a shift from working in isolation to more transparent teaching, and from traditional division meetings to authentic PLCs. Through this process, staff members recognized the professional expertise in their own building and reached out to each other to solve their problems together. The contribution and participation of Special Assignment teachers supported job-embedded learning and refinement of practice. The principal and teachers remain keenly aware of the value of time for them and for their students. Together they have established and continue to demonstrate the direct links among data analysis, student engagement and precise instruction that are the foundation for the improvements in student learning.

## Teaching, learning and leading ...

**Support for families.** The school shares in the board's inclusive mission to make sure all students have similar opportunities to learn and succeed. This sense of responsibility leads staff at all levels to pay close attention to the financial and emotional needs of the families in their community and to provide necessary support to help children succeed. The on-site Parenting and Family Literacy Centre allows staff to build relationships with families of future students.

**Emphasis on academics.** There is a shared belief at Blessed Kateri that "if the student isn't learning it, then we must find a way to get to that student with instruction that works." Staff share a collective determination to maximize the time students spend at school and to ensure that it is used to best advantage for student learning and growth.

**Independent reading.** This is the goal of all reading instruction at the school. Students are surveyed to determine their interests and passions so that stimulating and engaging resources can be purchased to encourage those interests. Resources are organized for ease of access by teachers and students.

**Small group instruction.** Teachers work with students to develop independent work habits and critical learning skills that will prepare them for a world that is rapidly changing. When working in small groups,



teachers can monitor student progress, offer explicit, precise instruction and provide immediate feedback. Students of all ages demonstrate their enthusiasm to work in small groups either with the teacher or with one another. As one student said, "Four brains are always better than one! You get more ideas together."

**Learning teams and shared leadership.** Staff members know that there is expertise within their school and within their board, ready and able to support their learning. They attribute progress to their work as a team of professionals willing to learn from and with each other. They take risks that they consider to be a sign of leadership, growth and lifelong learning. Staff members describe the principal as an instructional leader and an active learner in their Catholic professional learning community who supports shared leadership at the school.

"They're doing amazing things with math. These kids are going to be tremendous critical thinkers and problem solvers. I am absolutely blown away!" *Parent*

"We wouldn't be a School on the Move if we didn't work as a team." *Teacher*

"If a student isn't learning perhaps we haven't found the best way to teach him." *Principal*

"We don't work in silos. Every one is well aware that student achievement is at the top of the agenda." *Superintendent*

## Moving into the future

- ◆ practise teacher moderation on a regular basis in a more formal way as it is a valuable learning tool for teachers and it informs their instruction
- ◆ refine the implementation of Teaching and Learning Critical Pathways to gather data on how well a focused intervention works
- ◆ strengthen word study practices in the literacy block and develop a research action plan to see if doing so improves both reading and writing achievement and independence in writing