

Chief Dan George Public School

Toronto District School Board Toronto, Ontario

CONTACT INFORMATION

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About the school ...

Chief Dan George is a Kindergarten to Grade 8 school in Scarborough, a demographically diverse community in northeastern Toronto. The school draws children from both urban Toronto and outlying rural areas bordering York and Durham, serving over the years as a holding school for growing subdivisions without schools of their own. At present, there are approximately 340 children in attendance, some in transition from other schools and many from new immigrant families who have high expectations for education as the “ticket to the future.”

The physical setting of the school – wild turkeys and white-tailed deer visit the children’s playground – makes an indelible impression. So too does the spirit of openness and acceptance. Parents say, “There is heart here that you can’t describe.” With the enthusiastic support of the School Council, the school team works hard to create consistency and calm for the many children who, because of transience or newness to Canada, face challenges of adjustment.

Ongoing improvement ...

Chief Dan George Public School has shown steady and very significant increases in achievement in all six EQAO assessment results over the past three to four years. In 2004-05, four assessment results were at

Some Snapshots

Students ...

- participate in Tribes Community Circles, Future Ace Assemblies and classroom conversations
- support the Student Leadership Team (Grades 7 and 8 students) which acts as a consultative body, troubleshooting student issues with staff, parents and the community
- plan and run events with staff, welcome visitors, make school announcements

Parents ...

- appreciate open door policy, school and classroom newsletters
- welcome the school’s “power of thought”/inquiry approach even though many have more traditional ideas of education
- an active school council involves the community through annual Pancake Breakfast, Bowling Night, etc.

57 per cent or lower. When measured against the provincial standard of 75 per cent, all Grade 6 assessment results have increased over 20 percentage points since 2004-05 and are now all above the provincial target of 75 per cent of students achieving at or above the provincial standard. The Grade 3 assessment results are at 73 per cent or higher.

Success after struggle ...

The school’s struggles have related, at least partially, to being a “holding school” for three different communities over just six years. Rapid growth, frequent staffing changes and school organizational challenges presented different foci for staff, students and families in the community. In the midst of these changes, the staff decided they wanted to abandon isolated classrooms and take a more integrated whole-school approach to teaching and learning. They worked to develop consistency across classrooms and negotiated the best plan for the collective good. Working with large blocks of learning time, teachers are using flexible groupings and differentiating program to ensure that all children are successful. The staff realized that when they started planning together, they were able to turn to each other and ask for advice on how to implement strategies, such as flexible groupings, even more effectively. Norms were established and practised and routines were put into place that allowed students to work independently. The Junior teachers, in particular, have

noted that they have more time to spend with students in guided reading groups.

Teaching, learning and leading ...

Respectful learning environment. Staff members are vigilant in their supervision of student behaviour, employing such programs as Future Aces and Tribes to improve social skills and foster character development. They believe that it is what they do in the classroom as teachers that makes the difference in student learning and they model the respectful caring behaviour they expect from students for each other.

Focus on the big ideas. Wanting to stretch the children's thinking in every grade, the teachers are working to learn more about how to ask questions that provoke deeper answers from students. They are providing opportunities to respond to questions that really matter. They have discovered that children will dive into learning when the questions are more connected to their lives. Everyone understands that this is a cumulative process, starting in Kindergarten.

Professional accountability. The principal has played a strategic role in keeping the school team focused on the data and "what the school needs to do" to help the children learn and develop. "The excuse-making stage is over," said one teacher. "It's a slow process but we're all moving in the same direction." "Good things take time," said another. Using the teaching-learning pathway model, staff work collaboratively to identify learning needs, both their own and their students', and assume collective responsibility for successes and ongoing challenges.

Learning blocks for literacy and numeracy. With a bit more demographic stability in recent years, the school has been able to focus more on curriculum expectations and to this end has set up blocks of uninterrupted time for literacy and numeracy instruction. Timetabling is discussed – and negotiated – collectively so that students are able to spend large amounts of time reading, writing and thinking.

Comprehension and critical literacy. Staff members focus on strategies to help students go beyond the basics, to think about everything they are reading and writing and to appreciate what the text says to them. When children have reading strategies under their control, they are able to read for comprehension and to develop a joy of reading.



Problem-solving approach to learning. Teachers value student thinking and note there is more than one way to answer questions. They believe that students need opportunities to respond to questions that matter; questions that are connected to real examples in children's lives. They explicitly teach high-level thinking skills and believe that it is a cumulative process for children to become thinkers.

"The human quality that exists here is a rare thing. It really is about belonging." *Parent*

"Every single child, every single parent makes up the essence of Chief Dan George." *Parent*

"Not your children or my children but our children." *Teacher*

"Children like coming to school to learn in a respectful environment." *Principal*

"Things won't be totally different tomorrow – change is a slow process with a continued focus in one direction." *Superintendent*

Moving into the future

- ◆ learn more about how the brain works and strategies to teach students how to think
- ◆ teach students to advocate for themselves by helping them learn how they learn best
- ◆ acquire more knowledge about differentiating instruction to meet the needs of the diverse learners in every classroom
- ◆ learn more about the cultures of our students and how to sustain a culture of equity