

# Gosford Public School

## Toronto District School Board Toronto, Ontario

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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## Some Snapshots

### Students ...

- are encouraged to think divergently and creatively, to solve problems and to express their opinions
- participate in an enriched arts program from dance to visual arts to drama to support literacy (e.g., Gosford is a "Learning Through the Arts" school)
- enjoy a full range of intramural and team sports (e.g., basketball, soccer, 3 pitch, hockey)
- participate in lots of clubs and programs (e.g., Blue Spruce Reading Club, Silver Birch Book Club, Green Club, Little Ladies 4 Life, Boys to Men, Future Aces, Second Step)

### Parents ...

- are warmly welcomed and are encouraged to be an integral part of the school community
- assist with School Council, Nutrition Program, extracurricular activities and excursions
- connect with the school for Family Literacy Day activities, Literacy Evenings, School Concerts, EQAO Information Nights and Parent Workshops



## About the School ...

Gosford is a Junior Kindergarten to Grade 5 school at "Jane and Finch" – a neighbourhood in the northwest corner of Toronto that is a densely populated, extremely diverse and fighting hard for renewal. On a number of measures (e.g., the Learning Opportunities Index), this inner-city school is among the most highly challenged in the city, with a disproportionate number of children and their families facing circumstances of isolation, social adjustment and financial stress.

"The media has profiled the area with 'low expectations'," says the SO for Gosford's family of schools, "but this school is making a difference." For Gosford students, all 290 of them, all excuses for underachievement, no matter how daunting, are off the table. In the words of a parent, "No child is left behind. They expect the utmost best from every child." With student learning and achievement beginning to climb, the school is recognized in the community as a source of transformation.

## Ongoing improvement ...

In 2003-04, EQAO results for Gosford Public School showed fewer than 50 per cent of students were achieving at or above the provincial standard in all Grade 3 assessment areas. In 2007-08, EQAO results were all above 80 per cent. The increases ranged between 22 and 32 percentage points across all assessment areas. These results reflect the hard work of the school in the endeavour of improving student learning and achievement.

## Success after struggle ...

Gosford has participated in the Early Years Literacy Project and the Ministry OFIP program, both of which have brought additional resources of research, personnel and PD to the school. One area of particular concern was the difficulty that a number of Gosford children were experiencing in learning to read, a concern shared by other schools in their family of schools. Together these schools undertook an action research project in order to identify effective evidence-informed instructional strategies. The knowledge generated by this project was then used by Gosford teachers to provide intensive, daily reading instruction for a group of low-achieving students in each class. Recognizing the need for differentiated instruction, teachers used

assessment data to guide the selection of teaching approaches. Teacher collaboration increased and teaching practices were changed, resulting in an increased quality of instruction – and improved student results.

Another key area for change was school climate – behavioural concerns were impacting classroom programming and student learning. Recognizing the need to maximize time devoted to learning each day, the school team undertook a number of initiatives simultaneously. The School Code of Conduct was rewritten in student-friendly language. Direct teaching of expectations was also undertaken to help students learn and practise appropriate behaviour. All teachers, educational assistants and special needs assistants participated in school-based TRIBES training sessions.

## Teaching, learning and leading ...

**Use of data to inform instruction.** Early in the school year, teachers work together to unpack EQAO results to determine student strengths and identify concepts and skills that they need to address. Data from student assessments, such as CAPS (Concepts About Print), DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) and CASI (Comprehension, Attitude, Strategies, Interests), are gathered and analyzed to serve as a guide for meeting the specific needs of each student. Progress in reading in the primary division is monitored through monthly Running Records. Other assessment tools and guides, such as rubrics and exemplars, are used regularly throughout all grade levels and in many curriculum areas to assist teachers in focusing instruction and to guide students in achieving higher-level responses.

**Focused instruction.** Through a process of modelling/thinking aloud, shared and guided learning experiences and opportunities for students to apply their learning independently and in small groups, teachers gradually release responsibility for learning to the students. Q Charts serve as a guide for higher-order questioning and anchor charts, created with the students and posted in the classroom for future reference, assist students when they are responding to complex questions. Curriculum expectations are often clustered to align concepts across various subject areas. Students are challenged to think critically and are provided with lots of practice identifying main ideas and concepts, providing proof for their ideas and a rationale for a strategy chosen to solve a problem. They are encouraged to make connections to books and classroom experiences by relating “big ideas” to their own life, other texts and media as well as to the world in which they live.



Students receive direct instruction in making inferences, identifying points of view, formulating their own opinions and communicating ideas clearly and meaningfully.

**Professional learning communities.** Meeting regularly in professional learning teams has increased collaboration among staff and has encouraged a more reflective approach to teaching and learning. By conscientiously following a teaching-learning pathway approach in literacy, staff have examined curriculum expectations in detail, explored new assessment approaches, asked thoughtful questions, used evidence-informed strategies – and reached consensus on the necessary components of higher-level student responses. Gosford is a hub lead school with three other schools in the family of schools, deepening its commitment to research, reflection, dialogue and continuous improvement.

**“Everyone can see how dedicated the teachers are ... parents can call the school at any time. Teachers are accessible before and after school.” Parent**

**“We build on the children’s strengths to keep all children as part of the group. We embrace all the special moments.” Teacher**

**“Kids know their own learning goals and they know what to focus on. And how to get help.” Teacher**

**“We help children to see that there is a thought process. We help them to see their own thinking processes.” Teacher**

**“Changing the mindset of the children that ‘You can’ and the parents to believe ‘Their kids can’ is a whole big piece of what makes Gosford stand out.” Supervisory Officer**

## Moving into the future

- ◆ explore strategies to foster high-level mathematical reasoning and problem solving and to assist students in communicating their understanding of concepts.
- ◆ create a numeracy room to share professional resources and materials
- ◆ learn more about using interactive SMART Boards to enhance learning throughout the curriculum