

# Wilkinson Junior Public School

## Toronto District School Board Toronto, Ontario

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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## About the school ...

Wilkinson Public School is located in the Danforth/ Donlands community in east central Toronto. Built almost a century ago and named after an early Toronto Board of Education trustee and advocate for public education, the school today serves a tightly knit yet highly diverse community. The student population of 500 children, Kindergarten to Grade 6, represents at least 15 different language groups "presenting an opportunity," says the principal, "to learn about and celebrate our different cultures and experiences."

The commitment to inclusion and equity is a fundamental school principle, with staff embracing the notion that while "every child needs to feel he or she belongs, every child belongs to all of us." The welcoming, respectful and safe atmosphere of the school nourishes connections between and among staff, students and families, one teacher commenting, "[it's] grass roots, not top down - all of it is generated from natural relationships." This network of relationships enables the school to provide rich learning opportunities for students within and beyond the classroom. "There's lots of talk about our school," says one parent, "about all the great things that are happening here."

## Some Snapshots

### Students ...

- are encouraged to share their strengths and talents within the school community
- serve as reading buddies and classroom assistants who support the learning of younger students while reinforcing their own academic and learning skills
- join and participate with others in intramurals and teams (e.g., Frisbee, baseball, soccer and badminton) and clubs (e.g., chess club, comic book club, decorating club, and graphic arts club)
- take part in choirs and the arts (e.g., the impressive murals throughout the school are the result of students working with community artists to enhance their physical environment)
- serve as student ambassadors, interpreters and special friends to students who are new to the school

### Parents ...

- appreciate the open door policy and the willingness to listen, respond and help
- enjoy ongoing communication via email, phone, hallway or parking lot chats, during and after school
- work with staff to support activities in the classroom, outside the classroom and beyond the school
- support the School Council, which is active in bringing authors and artists into the school, in organizing and sponsoring school and community events, in providing financial support for instructional resources and in subsidizing student activities so that every child has equity of opportunity

## Ongoing improvement ...

With 74 per cent of Grade 3 students achieving at or above the provincial standard in reading, 81 per cent in writing and 93 per cent in mathematics in the 2007-08 EQAO assessments, the focus on higher levels of student achievement is evident. These results reflect significant improvements over time. On the Grade 6 assessments, there have also been improvements of between 17 and 35 percentage points over the last three years. The school's results are well above the board and provincial results.

## Success after struggle ...

The staff cite accessibility to student data as the beginning of their learning journey. The data allowed a careful assessment of student strengths and needs, facilitating more precise teaching by enabling teachers to match their instruction to the needs of groups of students as well as individuals. "Data help you see where the gaps are," says a Wilkinson teacher, "where the holes are that need to be filled."

Collaboration and professional sharing continue to grow at Wilkinson thanks to the professional learning opportunities provided by the board and by the family of schools focused on literacy, numeracy and leadership. Various teachers participate in these sessions and share their learning with their colleagues. The professional environment fostered by the school administration encourages teachers to contribute to one another's learning and to use their professional judgment to improve the learning of their students. The new teacher mentor program is providing newer teachers with opportunities to learn both from each other and from more seasoned teachers in the school.

## Teaching, learning and leading ...

**Focus on school-wide themes.** Administration and staff generate ideas and determine key opportunities to focus learning around school-wide themes. These themes are selected for their potential to engage students and staff together in rich and meaningful learning. One example is the "Telling Bee" initiative, which focuses on improving oral language through storytelling. Throughout the year, students meet and learn from storytellers, see their teachers model storytelling, talk with parents and family about their own stories, and develop and refine their stories. Their learning culminates with a published book that includes stories from every student and staff member at Wilkinson. Parents play an integral role in this endeavour, assisting with the storytelling, scribing and editing the final publication. Similar opportunities abound at Wilkinson, which are evidence of the school's commitment to engaging, relevant and intentional teaching and learning for all.

**Student needs.** Teachers use data to target student needs and then work to improve student reading, writing and math skills. Information provided by the board has supported analysis of each student's needs and progress and provides a focus for both classroom and small group instruction. By coupling academic data with learning skills data, the staff are able to broaden their analysis of performance to include not just academic results but the habits and personal skills that support effective learning, including attendance, work completion and teamwork.

**Common language.** The staff appreciate the value of common language. They see the benefit to students when there is a higher degree of consistency among teachers when they teach and employ common classroom terms and subject-specific vocabulary. Through discussions



across grades and divisions, teachers are able to create greater consistency in their instructional language.

**Focus on numeracy.** Use of math word walls and the focus on answering open-ended questions have helped to improve student skills in the area of mathematics. Appropriate and engaging manipulatives support this process.

**Distributed leadership.** According to the supervisory officer, "the principal constantly promotes the leadership of others." Teachers describe decision making in the school as a process that honours everyone's ideas, seeks innovation, respects teachers' professionalism and sustains a focus on improving opportunities for student learning and growth. Staff members assess all ideas and prioritize initiatives together, resulting in a sense of collective ownership for the school's direction. The administration and the staff lead by example, with high expectations for themselves as well as for their students. The administration actively and purposefully provides the encouragement, support, resources and conditions that the staff need to help students. At Wilkinson, leadership is a team event that includes staff, administration, parents, community and students.

"They take their personal time to support our kids - and that's very special." *Parent*

"The reduction in class size has enabled us to give more focused instruction to students and more attention to families." *Teacher*

"We're not changing the whole world today - We'll change one thing today." *Principal*

"This school's approach is always 'What can we do together to make this work for this child?'" *Supervisory Officer*

## Moving into the future

- ◆ learn more about whole staff planning, curriculum mapping across grades, identifying implications for assessment and reporting, and managing demands of curriculum expectations
- ◆ learn more about the structures that others are using to support professional learning, communication, decision-making and team processes
- ◆ find ways to further incorporate technology in ways that will expand learning and engage students in more interactive experiences
- ◆ find out more about how others are working to sustain high student achievement