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# the CASS CONNECTION

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## *Working Together* for Student Success





# Enhancing Best Practices to Boost Learning and Wellness

By Teresa Di Ninno and Pamela Edey, CAPE Public Charter School



Students enjoying the outdoor games for the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Photos courtesy of Teresa DiNinno.

CAPE's Kindergarten to Grade 9 student population has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Students and staff have faced repeated learning disruptions and the learning deficits, particularly in numeracy, have resulted in increased anxiety, social challenges, emotional dysregulation, and stress.

Sadly, the practice of cohorting significantly reduced student choice and interactions within mixed-age groups. Students voiced their concerns about losing those rich project learning environments and they are eager to resume these learning opportunities. Students have also been deprived of effective literacy and numeracy learning opportunities within homogeneous groups.

While the tiered literacy program has resumed as in the past, the numeracy program has been significantly revised. We have adopted the JUMPMath program school-wide and are engaged in staff capacity-building professional development in partnership with Gael James, our local JUMPMath

Outreach Manager, and Dr. Lissa D'Amour, our guide through the Math Minds course.

Our numeracy team has expanded to include four new staff members. Under the leadership of teacher Andrea Sanders, they are facilitating all aspects of the implementation of this program. The team has developed an assessment tool to gather accurate and meaningful information about our students' written numeracy skills. The members of the numeracy team gathered to review the data from these and other assessments and placed students in appropriate numeracy groups that correspond with their levels of development. These placements allow students to fill gaps in their knowledge when working below grade level or build on skills for those working on more advanced mathematical concepts.

Projects are back! One of our current offerings is an outdoor education project for Grades 3 and 4, which aims to engage students in the ecology of our local environment with fun, healthy ways to safely



National Day for Truth and Reconciliation CAPE shirts and designers.

enjoy and interact with the land. Students learn about the interconnectedness of the global planet, how human interactions have greatly altered nature, and develop the skills needed to successfully work as a group to tackle challenges. Many of our junior high students chose to register for a forensics project in which they learn about a variety

of investigation techniques used by law enforcement and apply these techniques to solve a “crime scene.” The Grade 2 students are learning about structures and architecture and with this project, they use science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) concepts to explore different structures and objects from around the world. They also read about and try different techniques to recreate those structures.

The very young have been particularly impacted by the imposed isolation over the last two years. As a result, CAPE has implemented a physical education time dedicated to team intramural sports. Each Friday morning, two of our younger classes play against each other. The desired outcome is physical activity, development of social/fair play skills, and having fun.

Establishing relationships at a time when we are all separated and scared is vital. CAPE has entered into a partnership with Mother Earth’s Children’s Charter School (MECCS) and we are hoping to share information and possibly establish student exchange visits between MECCS and CAPE School during the year. Mrs. Hildebrandt’s students have already started sharing activities with teacher, Sara Fairbrother’s Grades 4 and 5 students at CAPE by exchanging “All About Me” posters that allow students to get to know each other.

Both of our Grades 8 and 9 classes have been engaged in a cultural experience with the College Marcel Dorset in Le Vernet, France, arranged by teacher Pamela Edey. They are participating in a pen pal program and exchanging friendly letters with students of a similar age living in the city of Le Vernet, which is located close to Toulouse. This program allows our students to build relationships with others, while engaging and modelling the English language and learning about different cultures. Students in Grades 3 to 9 are also exchanging letters with Shinmachi Junior High School in Tokyo, Japan.

Our School Council, acutely aware of the negative impact of COVID-19 on our community, is also investigating safe activities to facilitate social interactions.

Addressing the health and wellness of the CAPE staff following the incredible challenges of COVID-19 has been the focus for our Board of Directors and administration team. The re-establishment of social connections has been identified as crucial to mental

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health. Regular staff lunches with social distancing, sanitizing, and masking measures facilitate visits and the sharing of successes, failures, and challenges. The Board continues to relax policies regarding personal/wellness days, and has secured a roster of substitute teachers and educational assistants to step in as staff are encouraged to take a day when needed. Additional mental health supports for staff and students are being investigated. This ensures all people in our building have the support they need to successfully attend school and learn.

The Board of Directors has provided rapid test kits to staff members and their families for peace of mind. Staff have been making use of these kits and appreciate their availability.

Teachers and educational assistants, with particular expertise and interests in several areas, work together to organize activities and events, identify and share resources, act as points of contact for the staff, and engage with other schools, agencies, and community groups. These groups include the literacy and the numeracy teams, the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit team, and the School-Wide Events Committees.

Through participation on these teams and committees, staff members are provided with an opportunity to develop leadership skills and work collaboratively to increase staff capacity in several areas. The work is distributed among several individuals using knowledge and skills of several staff members and fostering collaborative decision-making. The National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and the development of our land acknowledgement, 12 Days of Christmas, and the Remembrance Day activities speak to the effectiveness of these teams.

COVID-19 has impacted us in ways that we had never imagined. All our stakeholders have rallied to support our small community and to keep everyone as safe as possible. By working together as a community, we can get through these trying times. ■

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