

Waterloo Catholic District Schools
WELLBEING STRATEGY
FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS





Background...

Education institutions across Canada are opening their doors to international students from around the world. These institutions have various motives... from internationalizing their learning environment for Canadian students... to extending their classroom to countries and cultures around the world... to generating additional revenues through tuition fees... to supporting their local community-at-large with a significant economic stimulant.

Regardless of the motive, the best interests of these international students and their wellbeing in a welcoming environment is a foundational principle that must always be in the forefront of accommodations.

In Ontario, the Ministry of Education has made a commitment to both internationalizing our schools - *Ontario's Strategy for K-12 International Education, 2015* - and to ensuring that all students attending K-12 schools receive the necessary support for all dimensions of their well-being while in our school communities - *Ontario's Well-Being Strategy for Education, 2015*.

Many stakeholders are involved in ensuring our international students are well prepared and well supported for their new education experience, in a new country, and a new culture. It can never be assumed that students will fend successful on their own, that the adjustments are insignificant, or that their challenges and problems are someone else's concern. Nor can the fact be ignored that the expectation on students from other countries are often significantly different than Canadians and that the students themselves, and their parents, need time to adjust to Canadian education and lifestyle.

Waterloo Catholic District Schools have made a concerted effort to develop and implement an exemplary international education program that addresses the needs of the international learners (students and teachers) with an holistic perspective. On an ongoing basis, all stakeholders involved in supporting international students in our community must maintain an awareness of the "big picture" and an understanding that the wellbeing strategies and supports are interconnected. This interconnectedness and the associated accountability will ensure that students do not "fall through the cracks".



Enhancing the Experience: A Framework to Support International Students Attending Waterloo Catholic District Schools

Rationale

This framework is intended to act as a holistic guide for staff working with and supporting international students, at a Secondary level and in their first year of study, to ensure success and a positive experience while studying in Canada.

However, this document is not restrictive and therefore can be easily adapted for Newcomers, refugees and international students at the Elementary level.

Vision

Our Catholic Schools...heart of the community, success for each, a place for all.

Data Sources for Evidence Based Decision Making

The Waterloo Catholic District School Board considered a variety of sources when creating this framework. Some of the data sources may include, but are not limited to, reference to Ontario's Strategy for K-12 International Education, Ontario's Well-Being Strategy for Education, consultation with the University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University and Queens University, student development theory, and staff and student feedback.



Introductions & Orientation

This component is intended to provide staff members with the necessary information to familiarize students with their environment and support their transition.

Pre-Arrival Information

- All Pre-Arrival components will be the responsibility of the Waterloo Catholic District School Board's Research and Development Office (RDO)
- Once students have been accepted into the Waterloo Catholic District School Board an introductory email and information package will be provided, along with a survey for students to complete prior to arrival. The intention of the survey is to obtain a profile of the student, which would include, but is not limited to, personal and academic goals, interests, family composition, special learning or medical considerations, and perceived obstacles.
- Students will be informed of and thus have access to a social platform (possibly Google Classroom/ Hangout) whereby they can connect with one another, ask questions, access additional information (i.e. emergency numbers, community resources, practical information, such as where to buy groceries, how to dress for winter in Canada, transportation, websites, etc.)
- The mechanism to administer the survey should be done in an electronic format and accessible to students in their preferred language (Google Form). This survey can be incorporated into the comprehensive online orientation and language assessment already established for all new international students.



School/Community

- Student registration at their home school takes place alongside a staff from the RDO and Guidance Counselor. The registration process includes course selection, locker assignment, tour of the school, rules and expectations, and uniform information.
- Students will be informed of the following details; the role of a teacher, classroom norms and expectations, pathway planning, and what it means to do group work.
- Peer to Peer – Establish a formal peer to peer mentorship session (within the first week of arrival) which could include members from the school's International Certificate Program (ICP) and senior International Student's. This session would allow for socialization and the initial stages of community building. It would also introduce students to possible school clubs or teams they could join.
- As the first week concludes, a school-based social event is recommended.

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Engagement & Community Building

Building a community and network for students is crucial in order to circumvent potential issues that may otherwise arise such as Mental Health concerns

- Throughout the year a number of social activities will be offered to continue to engage students in their school/community. Activities may include, but are not limited to, a trip to Toronto, Niagara Falls, Oktoberfest, events that take place within their cultural community i.e. Chinese New Year.
- This is an opportunity to use the resources available within the Waterloo Catholic District School Board, such as St. Louis Adult Learning and Continuing Education (i.e. Chinese Language School), as well as community organizations such as the Multi-Cultural Centre.
- It is recommended that a formal student-led transition program be developed, similar to LINK Crew, to help students feel comfortable in their first year of study in Canada. This could include ICP students, student leaders, senior International Students, and a staff member to supervise.
- In addition to the ongoing support provided by the peer to peer model; two formal workshops will be available to students and are as follows:
 1. Cultural Awareness – This workshop would include information on Canadian culture, customs and laws, social norms and how to maintain your own culture while residing in Canada.
 2. Stress Management – This workshop would teach students how to identify stress within themselves, how to manage stress day to day, and would introduce resources and services in the community that could be accessed throughout their stay.



Learning

This component is intended to guide staff members in decision making for the academic needs of students.

Academic Supports

- All students attending the Waterloo Catholic District School Board have the following academic supports available:
 1. Classroom Teachers
 2. ESL Monitors
 3. Student Success Teachers
 4. Guidance Counselors
 5. Homework Clubs (during lunch and afterschool)

Identified Challenges

- Students may face a number of unique challenges that impede their ability to be successful both personally and academically. As a result, their Mental Health and Well-Being is often affected.
- In order to address these identified challenges a modified academic schedule may be necessary and will be determined by the academic team consisting of the above listed staff members. However, in some situations the addition of team members such as School Social Worker, is also an option.

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Mental Health & Well-Being

- To continue building community, additional workshops will be offered:
 1. Sleep, Hygiene & Healthy Eating - This workshop is designed for all students to attend and covers areas such as proper sleep habits, what is considered a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
 2. Addressing Stigma – This workshop will address how students can manage the stigma often associated with speaking out to receive additional support when a Mental Health concern arises.
 3. Healthy Relationships – This workshop is designed to teach students how to form new and healthy relationships, as well as maintain those back home.
- Continuing to utilize the online social platform; tips for managing stress, worries, upset, Apps, and resources, etc. can be consistently provided here to maintain the teachings of the workshops, while also promoting a network of support. Students are encouraged to share what strategies work for them. This is a helpful location for Ingle Insurance, the student's provider, to promote their offerings. The notion of creating a "wrap around" community is key to success.



Concerns & Crisis

- In situations where students are experiencing Mental Health challenges, concerns should be brought to the student's Guidance Counsellor. The first contact for the school (after Guidance or Administration) is the designated custodian. Early intervention is crucial and often prevents a crisis from occurring.
- Students can access individualized counselling through Ingle Insurance, and the provider must be a registered Psychologist or Social Worker.
- Students can also access, through Ingle Insurance, a 24/7 counseling line that is available in all languages.
- If there are concerns related to suicidal ideation or self-harm while at school, APH 019 - Suicide, Self-Harm and Depression Protocol, must be followed by staff at the designated school (see attached flow chart) – **insert flow chart graphic from protocol**
- The assigned School Social Worker will need to have access to a professional translator in order to complete an assessment. This service can be coordinated through the Research & Development Office.
- Safety planning will need to take place with the student, School Social Worker and the custodian present. It is strongly recommended that the plan be shared with the homestay, with the student's permission. If risk to others is present, then the homestay must be informed.
- Students can access the hospital if required.



Partnerships

- The Waterloo Catholic District School Board has developed many important and necessary partnerships in order to support International Students:
 - ◆ Waterloo Regional Police
 - ◆ KW Counselling
 - ◆ Ray of Hope
 - ◆ St. Adult Learning & Continuing Education
 - ◆ University of Waterloo
 - ◆ Wilfrid Laurier University
 - ◆ Queens University
 - ◆ Multi-Cultural Centre
 - ◆ Here 24/7



Staff Training

This component is intended to clearly explain the necessary training required for designated staff working with International Students.

Mandatory Training

- All Guidance Counselors with an International Student portfolio, ESL Monitors, and Program Heads (in English, Mathematics and Science) will be required to attend a one day workshop from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm at one of the Waterloo Catholic District School Board's Secondary Schools, hosted by Queen's University and Wilfrid Laurier University, which will encompass the following themes: Inter Cultural training, Mental Health and Well-Being and strategies to apply the knowledge – all specific to international students.
- The training will also highlight resources to help understanding culture general concepts and approaches, communication styles, and how students relate to power.
- \$6000 for the day for up to 25 people, plus travel costs for the staff coming from Queen's University
- If required an additional workshop more specifically addressing the Mental Health needs of international students can be customized and would be delivered by a cross cultural counselor (Psychologist).
- The expectation is that after receiving this training, staff from each Secondary School is required to present the information learning in a staff meeting (therefore all staff are introduced to the information).
- Existing orientations for homestay providers will remain in place.



Safe Talk Training

- Safe Talk training is a suicide prevention and intervention training currently offered by the Waterloo Catholic District School Board
- All custodians employed by the Waterloo Catholic District School Board are required to complete Safe Talk training
- All other staff members are also invited to participate in the training (this is mandatory for Guidance Counselors)

APH 019 – Training

- All staff members acting as custodians, Guidance Counselors, and Administrators are required to participate in a training done by the Waterloo Catholic District School Board's Chief Social Worker, on the APH 019 Protocol – Suicide, Self-Harm and Depression.
 - Appendix A

WCDSB Service Provider—Ingle Insurance

- Ingle Insurance will provide an in-service to the Waterloo Catholic District School Board's Guidance Counselors and Social Workers once per year in order to highlight specifically the offerings available. The in-service will also give the teams an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback.
- Ingle also offers a printed guide "Mental Health and You" as a resource—Appendix B



Evaluation

This component is intended to outline the means required to effectively evaluate student and staff experiences

Student & Staff

- As stated under the Introductions and Orientations component, students will complete a survey before arriving
- They will then complete a survey after their first term and a third time in June at the end of their first year
- The surveys will be available in the Google classroom previously created
- A survey will also be available at the end of each of the five workshops offered throughout the first year
- Staff will complete a survey at the end of the orientation process and at the end of the year. Will also have staff regularly communicating any concerns that may arise
- The social platform can also provide a space for ongoing feedback and thus allow for the opportunity to gain qualitative data
- Peer to peer events contained within the orientation component will also provide opportunity for focus groups to provide further feedback
- Two recommended tools can be utilized: The International Student Barometer <http://www.i-graduate.org/services/international-student-barometer/> and the National Survey of Student Engagement <http://nsse.indiana.edu/>
- It is also advantageous for International Students to complete the Waterloo Catholic District School Board's Resiliency and Strengths Based Education survey as it provides great insight into the needs of students and how the system is responding.

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Sources of Information, Advice & Guidance

Ontario's Strategy for K-12 International Education

Ontario's Strategy for K-12 International Education provides a framework International Education and is referenced for its alignment throughout the education system

Ontario's Well-Being Strategy for Education

Ontario's Well-Being Strategy for Education reminds us of the importance of the holistic student

Wilfrid Laurier University – Laurier International

In consultation with Wilfrid Laurier University's International Department we gained great insight into the necessity of orientation and consistent contact and support throughout the years of study, particularly in the first, training for staff and evaluation

University of Waterloo – International Student Experience

In consultation with the University of Waterloo's International Department we gained great insight into the importance of a peer to peer model for International Students and possible workshop offerings

Queens University – Queen's University International Centre (QUIC)

In consultation with Queen's University we gained great insight into the training process required for staff and those wanting to act as a peer support to International Students

Supporting and Enhancing the Experience of International Students in the UK

This document provides an outline of what a framework of support for International Students should offer while also demonstrating the need for a large network of options for students to engage with



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