



Vision

Achieving Excellence in Catholic Education
LEARN • LEAD • SERVE

Media Release

Feb. 26, 2020

For Immediate Release

Student eco champions earn Board commitment to prioritize environmental sustainability

PETERBOROUGH – The Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington (PVNC) Catholic District School Board committed to making environmental sustainability a Board priority Tuesday (Feb. 25) night after Trustees heard from a delegation of student eco champions who quoted Pope Francis in their call for action.

“He calls us all together to protect our common home, protect our earth that has been given to us by God,” junior student trustee Josh Hill said, quoting from Pope Francis’ Encyclical on the Environment.

Led by student trustees Eveline Fisher (Holy Cross CSS) and Hill (Holy Trinity CSS), the group of students presented six pillars of action to address environmental sustainability at a Board and school level.

“Students have begun to exercise their voice on the topic of climate change and the issues of what they are and need to be learning about in school and about how we can create sustainable school communities as a way of making a difference to improve the environment,” Fisher said.

The pillars of action - teamwork and leadership, energy conservation, waste minimization, school ground greening, curriculum and environmental stewardship – are the foundation of the Ontario Eco-Schools program, in which many PVNC schools are already engaged.

Under each pillar, the students presented a number of short and long-term actions the Board may consider, among them:

- Updating Board policies and strategic plan to outline expectations for all staff and students with regard to environmental sustainability.

- Prioritizing environmental education learning expectations in all schools by providing the necessary staff training to build capacity among teachers and leaders, ensuring that environmental topics in the current K-12 curriculum documents be taught and assessed for all students.
- Adopting the Eco-Schools program in all PVNC schools.
- Developing short and long-term environmental plans for the Board, creating a multi-disciplinary resource committee on the environment, and reporting to the Board of Trustees twice per year to assess the progress being made toward the established goals.
- Publicly challenging staff, students and families to become more ecologically conscious, to become engaged in the environmental education activities of their schools, and to be more actively involved in communal efforts to build a more ecologically sustainable world.

Director of Education Michael Nasello described the group of students as “deeply thoughtful, articulate and committed students” who are passionate advocates for the environment.

“I have been most impressed with these PVNC students,” Nasello said. “I’m grateful for their presence and their work on behalf of all the 15,000 students at PVNC.”

Jake Douglas, a Grade 12 St. Peter Catholic Secondary School student, spoke about the importance of youth action on climate change issues.

“(Eco anxiety) stems from uncertainty about the prosperity of our future as young people and from the disconnect between hearing about the climate crisis in the news and the inaction that we are seeing in those in power,” Douglas said. “It can be addressed most effectively by taking action as we are today.”

Following the students’ presentation, Trustees approved the following:

- That the board declare its commitment to the urgency expressed in Pope Francis’ Encyclical on the Environment and adopt a commitment to greater ecological sustainability in all of its educational, strategic, and corporate practices, AND;
- that the board review its Vision and Mission, Strategic Plan, and policies and procedures to ensure that environmental sustainability is given priority and that the six actions - teamwork and leadership, energy conservation, waste minimization, school ground greening, curriculum and environmental stewardship - are addressed, including roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders.

Board chairperson Michelle Griepsma praised the students, and told them their role as climate champions didn’t end with Tuesday’s presentation.

“This is a student-driven and student-led initiative and we are looking for your collective input and engagement at the school level. You are the champions here. It is your responsibility to go out and share that information with your fellow students,” Griepsma urged.

Background/Timeline:

Nov. 26, 2019 - Student trustees Eveline Fisher and Josh Hill presented to the Board of Trustees a summary of the Ontario Student Trustee's Association's [*Stewards of Sustainability*](#), a report created by the group's Catholic Board Council, which represents the voice of Ontario's 600,000 Catholic students. The report offers climate change recommendations to school boards.

Jan. 31, 2020 – Director of Education Michael Nasello, a group of board-level educators and the student trustees facilitated a planning session with 30 “eco champions,” elementary and secondary students from a variety of schools, to brainstorm and develop a call to action for environmental sustainability at the Board and school level.

Feb. 25, 2020 – A delegation of students representing the eco champions presented their call to action to the Board of Trustees. Trustees voted to declare the Board's commitment to the urgency expressed in Pope Francis' Encyclical on the Environment, and adopt a commitment to greater ecological sustainability in all of its educational, strategic, and corporate practices.

PVNC provides education to more than 15,000 students. Follow us on Twitter and Instagram @PVNCCDSB and like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/PVNCCDSB.

- 30 -

For more information, please contact Galen Eagle, PVNCCDSB Communications Manager, at:
(705) 748-4861 ext. 245 or geagle@pvnccdsb.on.ca