



Charity at the Heart of St. Francis Xavier CHS

St. Francis Xavier Catholic High School provides an intermediate and secondary program to 400 students in rural Hammond. Offering a myriad of programming options, the school boasts highly competitive athletics programs, music programs including a concert/jazz band, choir and intermediate band, French Immersion and three Specialist High Skills Major programs (Transportation, Health and Wellness, and Hospitality and Tourism).

Principal Ralph Sharples introduced members of the school community in attendance, including Vice-Principal Tracey Clarey, Chaplain Fr. John Whyte, Chaplaincy Leader Nick Ali, Teacher Tammy Oldford, and students Cassidy Lafleche, Alex Lavoie, Kaitlyn Provost, and Victoria Oldford. The group shared details about the school, including various programs offered and information about special events, social justice initiatives, community partnerships, and innovative fundraising strategies for the Guatemala Exposure Trip and other school programs.

Vice-Principal Clarey began with an introduction of the school's Special Education Program.

"One of the things we are particularly proud of are our specialized Special Education classes. Our students don't always have access to the specialized programs offered at St. Matthew or St. Luke, so we took it upon ourselves, with the support of the Board, to create some of our own programs," began Clarey. "We have an Intermediate program called Bounce Back, which is a multidisciplinary program that captures a lot of students that may fall through the cracks otherwise, including students with autism, students with behavioural challenges, and students with anxiety or mental health concerns."

The Grade 9 and 10 Foundations Program is also offered, along with the MEP program.

"Just about 10 per cent of the school population is part of one of the specialized special education programs," noted Clarey.

The school also offers a Health and Wellness Program and an Automotive Program, which has helped learners to gain amazing skills, and to improve the employability of graduating students.

The school hosts four major events throughout the year including the annual Feast Day luncheon on December 3, and the Wheels and Heels event which attracts between 300 and 500 people and over 60 vendors setup in the school gymnasium.

The Feast Day of St. Francis Xavier was held on December 3, and is a school wide event which takes place annually.



"The Feast Day event focuses on building the triad of the church, the family, and the school. We have the Archbishop come to celebrate mass, as well as members of the executive council and trustees, and we celebrate as a school community," explained Chaplaincy Lead Nick Ali.

The mass is followed by a lunch at Bourget Community Hall, and afterward the students go back to school to participate in fun, community building activities.

"Last year it was a student/teacher hockey game," noted student Alex Lavoie.

The school's SHOUT Team (Students Helping Others Unite Together) is open to both intermediate and secondary students. The SHOUT Team organizes and oversees many charitable initiatives including the school's canned food drive, the Christmas Angels initiative, the annual Lenten clothing drive, and other fundraising initiatives for the local community. Currently, 65 students are part of the SHOUT Team.

"The main event is the canned food drive where between 1,500 and 2,000 items are collected, and it is done post-Thanksgiving, when the food bank is depleted," explained student Victoria Oldford.

Christmas baskets are also assembled for families in need within the school community. Money is collected from all of the classes leading up to Christmas. In 2018, the school raised \$1,500 which was used to purchase items for the baskets.

The baskets are delivered to families by Fr. John Whyte and the school Student Support Worker.

"The school is so generous with the baskets," explained Fr. Whyte. "I get tears and phone calls and very sincere messages of thanks from the recipients, and it is really a highlight of Christmas for me."

The Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) – Hospitality Program has been offered at St. Francis Xavier Catholic High School for over five years. Taught by Louise LeClair, the program has 17 students participating this year, with six graduating in June with their SHSM. The program is designed to give students authentic learning experiences in preparing, presenting and catering, cultivating a sense of pride and accomplishment for the students.

"Our Hospitality and Tourism program has had a lot of growth over the last five years, especially in the way of facility improvements," noted student Kaitlyn Provost. "We've recently received new induction stovetops, as well as an industrial dishwasher and sink, as well as a new convection oven, which helps to make a lot of food more quickly."

The Hospitality and Tourism program also runs a school lunch program, which they fundraise for. The students prepare food, which is then frozen in individual portion sizes. This food is then distributed to students should they forget, or not have any lunch. The program is also supported by the Catholic School Council.



"Many thanks to the students and staff who came today to present about the outstanding programs and amazing charitable work happening at the school," concluded Trustee Sue Wilson. "You have made the name of St. Francis Xavier well known throughout Prescott-Russell."

Special Education Multidisciplinary Team

As a result of new funding in 2018, the CDSBEO Special Education Department was able to hire an Occupational Therapist, a Board Certified Behaviour Analyst, and an additional Speech Language Pathologist that would be dedicated to the Special Education Multidisciplinary Team, which also includes other members of the Special Education Department. The vision of the Team is to assess and support students with complex multiple exceptionalities who struggle. These are students who, despite their best efforts, continue to struggle or be in crisis. When this happens, consultants speak to the team and make a recommendation to the Principal of Special Education to have the Multidisciplinary Team involved.

Principal of Special Education Heather Gerber, Speech Language Pathologist Tiffany Ashford, and Board Certified Behaviour Analyst Sandra O'Doherty presented information to the Board of Trustees about the Multidisciplinary Team, and how it works to support students with complex developmental and behavioural challenges through a transdisciplinary approach to assessment and school consultation.

"It is my honour to be part of this very well educated team," began Principal Heather Gerber. "They come together with such enthusiasm to assist students through a transdisciplinary approach, which means that they look at the student as a whole. The multidisciplinary approach ensures that the student is at the centre, the focus."

The advantages of a multidisciplinary approach includes the ability for the team to consider complex, multidimensional student needs, as well as interdisciplinary collaboration. Team members gather information through observing, assessing and discussing the exceptionalities of the learner through the lens of their various disciplines. The support is dynamic and includes trialing strategies, modelling, and adapting and adjusting goals and strategies as the needs of the student and the school change.

"As a team, we look at the specific goal for the student, the specific behaviour to be addressed, and try things out to see what strategies are working," noted Ashford. "We then adjust as needed, and try different strategies. It is important to have that cyclical piece – there is a process, we must observe the student, look at outside reports, assess the data, and come up with a plan. Once there is a plan, we go back and meet with parents and with school teams to review and deliver the plan."

The group shared case study details of one student.



"We thought we would take a moment to share one of our journeys with you, and it's a pretty great journey," began Gerber. "I'm very proud of the team, and I'm particularly proud of this student. We are early on in the process, but we have a little bit of data to share with you, and we think you will be very impressed."

The student is a secondary student with moderate cognitive impairments, a complex medical history that is evolving, limited exposure to a school environment, and a physically aggressive response to staff.

"He is highly motivated by social engagement, but was inconsistently able to participate in social interactions functionally or in a positive manner," explained Ashford. "The physically aggressive response was used to escape or avoid a task."

"The recommendation was to increase the opportunity for the student to have positive interactions with staff, and increase participation in activities that the student finds meaningful. This was achieved by introducing games that naturally require a back and forth social interaction and turn taking. As he is a secondary student, we wanted to choose games that are appropriate for his level but also socially appropriate for the environment."

To overcome the challenge of limited verbal communication skills, the staff at the school shared photos with the student's parents to provide an opportunity for the family to have a conversation about what he did during his school day. By increasing social interaction, the staff were able to reduce the unwanted responses, by teaching gentle touch to replace a non-gentle touch. By responding appropriately to the student's verbal attempts at communication, and diverting attention with high social engagement during times that typically result in a high level of unwanted behaviour, and increasing opportunities for multisensory touch opportunities, great gains have been achieved.

The strategies were extremely successful in reducing the student's aggressive behaviour toward staff, and also contributed to enriching opportunities for more meaningful social interaction and learning experiences.

"Teaching him how to touch gently and how to get attention through a gentle touch was key, and we taught this through modelling – teaching high-fives, teaching fancy handshakes," explained O'Doherty. "When we teach, we see that it is possible to open the door for success in school."

The team implements many different types of different responses based on the needs of the student, and with all aspects of specialization being considered – behaviour, communication, and developmental and sensory processing.

"As you can see, we truly give a voice to students who don't have a voice," concluded Gerber. "Our team goes above and beyond to connect with each of these students in a unique way that meets their individual learning needs."