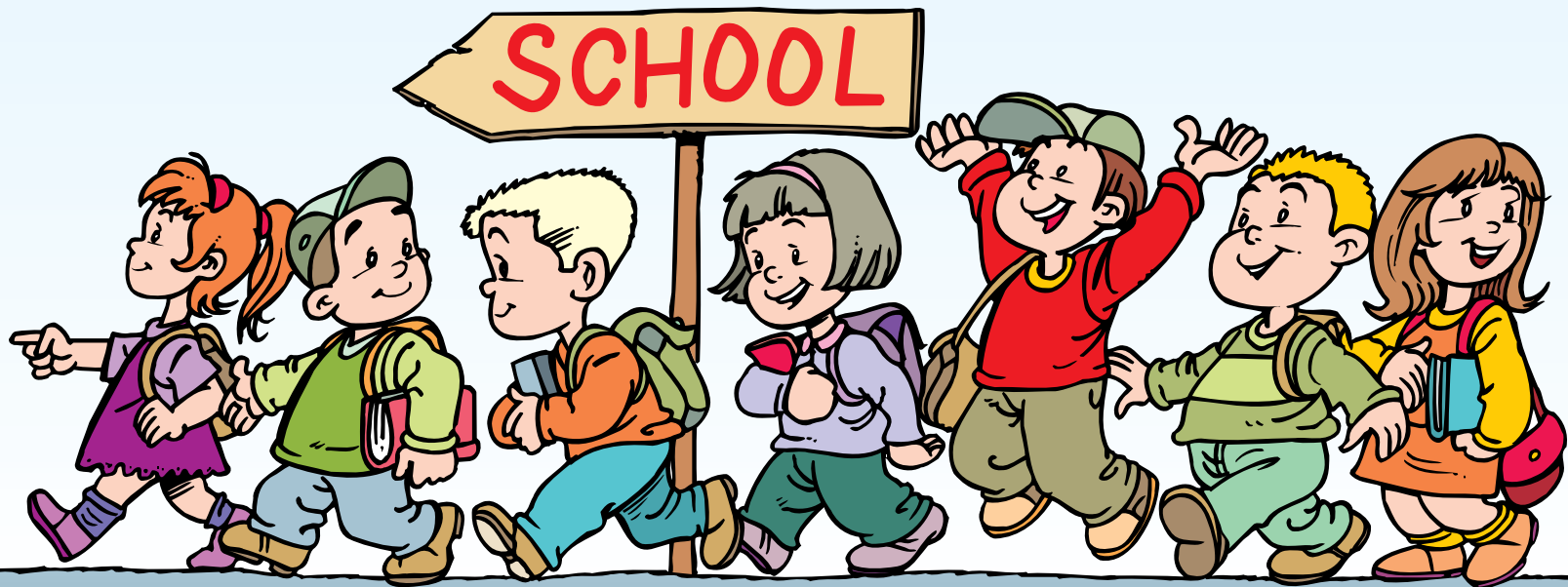


# Take our Kids to High School Day



*On November 5, 2008, Jean Vanier Catholic Secondary School in Scarborough hosted 450 students from local elementary schools for Take our Kids to High School Day. As we said goodbye to our Grade 9 students leaving for Take our Kids to Work Day, sponsored by The Learning Partnership, staff and students focussed their talents on organizing and welcoming our elementary guests to a unique day in the life experience of a secondary school student.*

Students from eight elementary schools in Scarborough had a chance to get to know each other, the school facility and Jean Vanier staff and students. This exciting day is part of our school's student success initiative and is intended to facilitate the transition from elementary to high school. Although not all of the 450 students will be attending Jean Vanier Catholic Secondary School in the fall, each student benefited from their experience.

Students began their day in the gymnasium with a welcoming prayer and a series of interactive get-to-know-you games hosted by our leadership students. When students arrived they were separated into eight teams. They were given a Jean Vanier toolkit, which included a timetable, a pencil and a healthy snack. These specially monogrammed backpacks also helped to identify visiting students in the school and were a great souvenir for the participants.

Jean Vanier student leaders accompanied each team of students as they rotated through their four, one-hour class blocks mimicking a typical high school day, including a self-serve lunch from our cafeteria. The curriculum for the day was designed with fun and learning in mind. Students experienced a science lab where they used digital microscopes to examine pond water for signs of life. In the chemistry lab, they had fun exploding gummy bears. Photoshop was their passport around the world, as they superimposed digital photos of themselves onto famous international landmarks. Leadership students led participants on a school-wide scavenger hunt where they discovered our specialty programs including fine arts and auto mechanics. A lesson on communication and public speaking allowed them to hone their improvisational skills.

Preparing for this day was truly a team effort. The student success team, comprised of administrators, guidance counsellors, teachers and staff began by identifying the key components to planning a meaningful day. A resource binder, provided by the Toronto Catholic District School Board's central student success team, helped frame priorities and protocols for the day. The guidance department was responsible for identifying and inviting grades 7 and 8 classes. It was imperative to the success of this project for the guidance department to foster positive relationships with the elementary principals and classroom teachers. The guidance department was able to support the teachers in preparing permission forms, coordinating transportation and other details such as money and orders for the cafeteria lunch. Participating departments were responsible for creating the curriculum for the day and organizing the staff to teach the lessons.

Student council and student volunteers were an integral part of the day. They were responsible for ensuring the success of the classroom rotations, leading the groups of students from one activity to the next and ensuring participation by all the students. They also organized and ran the student scavenger hunt. Departments selected student volunteers to help facilitate the classroom lessons, highlighting the many talents of our community.



An example of student work created in a Communications Technology class at Jean Vanier's *Take Our Kids to High School Day*.

Since our students and staff were looking after our young visitors, the intermediate teachers from both the elementary and secondary panels were free to dialogue and participate in professional development opportunities. Teachers shared ideas and best practices on topics such as technology in the classroom, including the use of SMART boards, and literacy and numeracy development. They enjoyed a discussion about pathways for success led by our guidance department. The opportunity to share a cup of coffee and great conversation with colleagues was valued by all involved.

Post-event activities were provided for teachers through the centrally developed resource binder. The binder also provided the following tips for planning the *Take our Kids to High School Day*.

- Set regular meeting times for your team starting in September.
- Decide how many Grade 8 students you can accommodate.
- Designate which rooms will be used.
- Determine how best to use senior students.
- Establish how lunch will occur for this day.
- Establish how students will be transported to and from the high school.
- Determine how you will assign each student a timetable.
- Determine how you will distribute the timetables.
- Communicate the plans to the rest of your staff.

Overall the day was a huge success. When we met as a team to reflect upon the experience, we enjoyed reading the many thank you letters from the Grade 8 students and teachers who participated in the event. The student feedback made all our efforts worthwhile.

- *It felt very real going to different classes. I think I will be less nervous when it comes to my first day of high school.*
- *Although many students think high school is scary, there is nothing to worry about. You get to make new friends and the teachers were welcoming.*
- *I learned to just be yourself. People help you out with difficulties.*
- *My favourite part of the day was the whole day!*
- *Take Our Kids to High School Day was a really fun and educational experience!*

If you have any further questions about the day or would like a sample schedule, contact [gianna.helling@tcdsb.org](mailto:gianna.helling@tcdsb.org) or [bianca.auciello@tcdsb.org](mailto:bianca.auciello@tcdsb.org).