2021
A Year in Review
2021 Highlights

- Launch of the Multi-Year Strategic Plan for 2021-2026.
- Distribution of Director's Annual Report.
- Recognized by the Ombudsman in his annual report for the successful and timely Implementation of Ontario Ombudsman’s recommendations.
- Recognized by the Province for summer programs.
- Provincial recognition for launch of Thrive Health program.
- Aggressive submission of grant proposals to enhance services of the Board.
- Launch of the North Bay Facilities Study.
- Initiation of two new schools to be built in North Bay and Parry Sound.
- Creation of online modules of learning for all staff in the interest of leadership and succession planning.
- New Partnerships with key stakeholders explored across all regions.
- Increased communication and updated presence on social media platforms.
- Initiation of board office reorganization.
- Equity Advisory Circle and Indigenous Youth Advisory Circle formed.
- District Wide PSW Program launched.
Governance

Multi Year Strategic Plan
The requirement to create a Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP) is a legislated responsibility and boards have recognized for a long time that this is an important governance practice. The NNDSB Board of Trustees took this essential part of their role very seriously and engaged in several months of research and planning to create vision, mission and value statements that exemplify NNDSB.

The final document, which spans 2021-2026 is ambitious, relatable and inspiring. It is inclusive of diverse points of view and showcases the board’s commitment to its students, staff and community in a stance of equitable opportunity and success for all. The plan is organic in nature thus allowing for improvements to be incorporated at any time.

It is noteworthy that NNDSB engaged the support of several consultants including one of Canada’s premiere research and communication specialists Nanos Research, who assisted with baseline data and communications expertise. As part of the communication strategy to promote the MYSP upon its launch, NNDSB held a series of public information sessions and posted a summary on the board’s website with a link to the full version of the MYSP. NNDSB made the MYSP available to board staff, students, families, community organizations, and other stakeholders.

NNDSB is ensuring the alignment of strategic plans to the four priorities of the MYSP: excellence in building relationships, excellence in communication, excellence in innovation and excellence in teaching and learning. The MYSP is referenced regularly in board communications and at board meetings. NNDSB staff will continue to promote a positive way forward for all. Everyone should see themselves reflected in the MYSP.

Consultation process streamlined
Through the Director, Superintendent Gay Smylie presented a report to the Board in September 2021 that proposed an amendment to streamline the consultation process required for development, creation or update of operational policy and guidelines. At that time, trustee approval was required to proceed to a public consultation on a proposed guideline, policy or update. To avoid delay and time at a public meeting for consultation approval, NNDSB’s executive council sought the Board’s expressed consent to move all administrative guidelines to public consultation once approval has been provided by executive council. This process expedites the consultation process while upholding the integrity and intent of the Board’s governance policies.

Bylaw Refinement: consultation and development of BL-122 Extraordinary Circumstances
NNDSB has been operating under the auspices of the approved bylaws since the approval of the Governance Manual in June 2020. Appropriate governance and information exchanges between the Board of Trustees and its committees and the Board of Trustees and the Director is now routine. As part of its efforts towards excellence in communication, highlights of Board meetings are published and distributed through NNDSB’s new strategically designed communication protocols as an additional measure of transparency on top of posting agenda packages, observing notice periods, and live-streaming Board meetings.

Governing during a pandemic has highlighted a need to respond quickly and innovatively in many situations. In order to respond to urgent and priority matters, the Board developed a bylaw with protocol for extraordinary circumstances. NNDSB’s Extraordinary Circumstances bylaw is based on similar tools used by higher education institutions, municipal governments, and fellow DSBS. BL-122 was approved in September 2021, and is viewable as part of the updated Governance Manual on the board’s website, found here.

Board Committees Refined Process
Following the reorganization of committee representatives in January, Chair Aspin provided direction to all trustee committees to ensure the selection of a committee chair, and development of a Terms of Reference as two additional measures of effective committee-level governance. Terms of reference are used to set out the parameters within which the authority is delegated to committee by the Board of Trustees. It is noted that the Board of Trustees has approximately 13 committees. In all cases, committee chairs were established. They now plan meetings, set agendas and take minutes that culminate in reports to be shared with the Board. They provide leadership to ensure each committee fulfills its’ mandate. Throughout 2021, five committees brought forward their Terms of Reference for review and approval by the Board. This is expected to be a renewed area of focus for 2022, with the addition of new committees and cessation of those committees whose mandates have been fulfilled.
Building Leadership Pools
NNDSB is engaged in new proactive and cyclical recruitment and selection processes to build sustainable talent pools of principals and vice principals for the future. The NNDSB goal is to maintain pools of exceptional leaders to serve our students, families, staff and community partners. This translates into exciting career opportunities for innovative and visionary education leaders who welcome the chance to ensure staff and student achievement and well-being in close collaboration with all stakeholders. The new recruitment process is under way and the first round of interviews was completed in early December.

Leadership development is essential to building a succession plan that propels NNDSB into growth. The purpose of succession planning is to make sure NNDSB always has the right leaders in place. Authentic engagement in a comprehensive leadership plan is our best chance to evolve and thrive in our everchanging environment. This means that it is of the utmost importance for our current leaders to set the example for those who aspire to lead. This is accomplished in the modelling of leadership qualities as established in the Ontario Leadership Framework.

Succession Planning: Digital Learning and D2L E-Portfolios
With the new NNDSB succession planning framework, comes a shift to online electronic portfolios (e-portfolio) for leaders. A portfolio should be a living document, a chance for leaders and mentors to gather, reflect upon and dialogue about evidence of growth and change. Leaders and mentors share in the accompanying comprehensive online leadership learning that occurs in the creation of the portfolio as leadership capacity is built.

Experienced leaders build and reflect upon their learning through action and through the act of mentoring others. The portfolio is used in the principal and vice principal placement process and when applying for system roles.

The move to the e-portfolio allows leaders to include a wide variety of evidence of leadership capacity, from simple documents to digital presentations, and video. The e-portfolio is an innovative way to demonstrate self-reflection and celebrate growth.

NNDSB staff designed a new leadership development framework which was introduced in the 2020 Year in Review document. The framework now accompanies independent learning modules that were built in the summer of 2021 based upon months of consultation with various proven leaders. The modules have been designed for the NNDSB online Learning Management System (LMS). This blended mode of reflective independent learning coupled with action learning and mentor/mentee reflection allows leadership candidates to learn in varied modes and at a pace that works for them. The learning is individualized and calls for independent research based upon foundational learning that allows leaders to engage in gradual exploration of key leadership qualities and operational responsibilities of the leadership roles they seek.

The learning is tailored to those who are interested in taking on leadership and to those who aspire to an administrative or system leadership role. Each level of learning is framed in a reflective stance with the support of a leadership mentor.

Next Steps:
Formal Succession Planning for Staff not in Traditional Education/Teaching Roles.
Although the first two phases in the online learning modules will benefit leaders in any role in NNDSB, human resources and senior staff will also work to create a formal framework for succession planning in all other employment areas. Staff have been encouraged to ask for opportunities to cross train in areas of interest to promote a 360 degree view of the organization. They are encouraged to show their interest in learning new roles and or engaging in professional development opportunities.
2020-2021 Budget
Near North District School Board presented a compliant budget for the 2020-2021 school year. The 2020-21 operating budget projected total revenue of $160,649,526 and total expenditures were projected at $160,572,833.

In 2020, the NNDSB Board of Trustees struck a Finance Committee to provide a further layer of financial oversight. The Committee is comprised of trustees and members of the senior leadership team. In 2021, the Committee oversaw the development of a budget procedures manual that aligned the budget development processes to the goals of student achievement and well-being. Under the leadership of Vice-Chair John Cochrane, the Finance Committee established a quarterly monitoring cycle to ensure trustees remained apprised of three main priorities: Financial Operating Results, Accumulated Reserves and the Trustee Development Reserve Fund. As a committee of the Board, the Finance Committee provides regular reports at monthly Board meetings to ensure the Board continues to demonstrate transparency and accountability.

COVID Related Funding
NNDSB has taken full advantage of all COVID related offers to promote the health and safety of our staff and students.

During the remote learning period, teachers have leveraged board tools to ensure a continuation of learning and well-being. Students continue to benefit from a wide range of board provided virtual resources - including Microsoft Office 365, Adobe Creative Cloud, Virtual Library, Dreambox Learning, and more. Supported by the Ministry of Education’s second phase of investments provided under the Safe Return to Class Fund, NNDSB received funding to support the purchase of additional technology including laptops, iPads and internet connectivity devices. Funding was based on projected average daily enrolment whereby the Ministry of Education ensured every school board received a minimum of $200,000 to support the purchase of devices.

Funding through the federal government’s Climate Action Incentive Fund (CAIF) has paid for almost $300,000 of work that has been completed at two Near North District School Board (NNDSB) schools. CAIF is designed to help school boards make energy efficiency improvements and retrofits that reduce energy use, costs and carbon pollution. The funding covered projects that were federally approved and already completed. Funding covered the installation of a rooftop HVAC/ERV and controls at Chippewa Secondary School ($116,844), which will improve energy efficiency, and roof and insulation replacement at Mattawa District Public School ($175,060), which will reduce heat loss. The $291,904 investment in NNDSB schools will create cost savings for the board while at the same time reducing our carbon footprint in line with our recent commitment to environmental stewardship. The work was completed in the fall of 2020, and the board proactively pursued CAIF funds in 2021 to recoup these costs when the new funding was announced by the Ministry of Education.
In addition, NNDSB undertook an aggressive campaign to access joint federal and provincial infrastructure funding to improve air quality in classrooms. This resulted in $6.2 million in additional funding. The funding, under the COVID-19 Resilience Infrastructure Stream: Education Related (CVRIS), is part of a larger project that provides upgrades to public infrastructure. NNDSB’s application included the evaluation of building systems, verification of performance, review and update of recommended maintenance measures for air handling systems. The funding covers the purchase and installation of ventilation equipment for 15 schools and will optimize air quality in a variety of spaces.

NNDSB continues to actively pursue opportunities to support the safety and well-being of students and staff. The board adheres to health and safety protocols as per the Ontario Government, Ministry of Education and local health authorities. NNDSB is grateful for Ministry of Education support.

Fund Alignment
In the 2021 year, the emphasis on the alignment of funds to support student programming has allowed NNDSB to find the means to improve existing programs and support the building of new learning that meets student needs and pathway goals. Collaborative meetings around aligning funds and initiatives to meet the four priorities in the MYSP are allowing NNDSB to provide enhanced student learning opportunities. This includes but is not limited to outdoor experiential learning, and pathways exploration through funding such as: outdoor education funding, Skills Catalyst grant, Specialist High Skills Major and Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program funding. Careful alignment meant we were able to hire a grade 7-12 math facilitator September 2021 to work alongside the k-12 math facilitator to improve math teaching and learning including the successful implementation of grade 9 de-streamed mathematics. This approach to strategic alignment also allowed us to meet the growing needs of students grade 7-9 through the hiring of an intermediate literacy and math facilitator. This approach will assist teachers in closing gaps due to COVID disruptions and create sustainable capacity building for future learning.

Capital Priorities
Capital Priorities information is updated on a regular basis.

North Bay Facilities Study
The amalgamation of three secondary schools in North Bay is step one of a complicated process. NNDSB must now consider the buildings that are slated for closure through the Ministry of Education. NNDSB is moving proactively to ensure a timely resolution to school closures moving forward. Lygia Dallip, former MOE analyst was secured in 2021 to complete a strategic facilities study and to create a report with her recommendations for the North Bay area. The study included several North Bay facilities. Ms. Dallip’s preliminary report was submitted to the Ministry of Education in the fall of 2021. In 2021-22, Ms. Dallip will work with the Ministry of Education on compliance with Capital Branch requests for modifications to the proposal submitted in 2021 for capital projects.

W.J. Fricker Build
Capital funding was committed to build a new elementary school on the W.J. Fricker Public School site at 790 Norman Ave. in North Bay to accommodate JK-Grade 6 students from E.T. Carmichael and E.W. Norman Public Schools, along with Extended French Grade 5 and 6 students from W.J. Fricker Public School. The construction of integrated childcare facilities has also been approved with one infant, one toddler, 2 pre-school rooms as well as the construction of a new EarlyON Child and Family Centre, Working in partnership with the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board (DNSSAB) and third-party licensee, YMCA Northeastern Ontario, children and families can expect a seamless approach to quality childcare and school programs in one facility. The Ministry of Education approved the work on the Fricker site to go to tender in August 2021. The tender closed on Sept. 23, 2021.

New JK-12 Parry Sound School
It was announced in February 2021 that the Ventin Group (+VG Architects) was awarded the contract to design a school that seamlessly transitions area children from daycare through to secondary school in a building that is modern and reflects the needs of 21st century education. The school will include a childcare centre and an EarlyON Child and Family Centre, Architectural drawings for the proposed facility were shared with stakeholders in Spring 2021, including teaching and operation staff, students and First Nations representatives. NNDSB is committed to creating a welcoming and inclusive facility that meets the needs of all learners. Based on enrolment, a double gym and a single gym have been approved, in essence creating three functional gym spaces. We continue to work with the Ministry of Education Capital Projects Branch. +VG architects and professional consultants will implement as many elements as our budget will allow.
Organizational Review
Since January of 2020, supported initially by organizational consultants Ramsay Partners Inc., NNDSB has been immersed in a plan to streamline processes and better align role responsibilities to address the recommendations made by the special advisors to the Minister of Education.

Progress thus far toward Next Steps Identified in 2021 include:

- Examination and creation of role descriptions for all departments is ongoing.
- Currently piloting the merging and changes in operational roles in Finance and Human Resources.
- Shifts to new role performance for those affected are being supported and revised as required.
- NNDSB continues the move to right fit and filling gaps in areas where it has been determined that we have been critically understaffed starting with HR manager position which was filled in August 2021.
- Promoting professional development and or cross training as required.
- Currently creating a plan for cross training in all departments to reduce the problem of “keepers of the knowledge” so that when a key individual is away for any reason, business can continue.
- Organizational flowchart has been created and distributed to principals and managers for feedback. The editing process is ongoing as roles are filled.
- Introduction of the succession planning framework is complete and determination of a new method for management of process is ongoing.
- Vice Principal, Principal and Supervisory Officer recruitment processes have been strategically designed and recruitment has begun.

Progress thus far toward organizational efficiencies in Human Resources include:

- Realignment of HR roles to align around key HR processes.
- Increased management controls around key HR processes.
- Reconciliation of staffing within individual schools to optimize funding opportunities and enhance integrity of Human Resource data bases.
- COVID support in terms of managing the attestation process, medical leaves and distribution of rapid antigen testing and continual communication to employees.
- The process utilized above was recognized for its effectiveness throughout Canada. NNDSB managed the process of attestation and testing in a fashion that was cooperative with the unions and resulted in no employee terminations unlike other organizations.
- Redesign of recruitment processes.
- Introduction of competency-based interview processes which was effectively utilized to recruit two new principal hires and the principal pool.
- Recruitment process now includes feedback and development planning for unsuccessful internal interviewees.
Ombudsman Acknowledges Positive Changes
Near North District School Board is pleased to be acknowledged in the 2020-2021 Ontario Ombudsman’s Annual Report. In the 2021 report, Ombudsman Paul Dubé commended the board for its commitment to “enhancing the transparency of its decision-making processes” and noted he was looking forward to receiving updates on the implementation of his recommendations. Following a thorough investigation in 2019, Dubé had identified the areas for improvement and gave 14 recommendations. NNDSB has implemented 12 of 14 recommendations. The final two will be considered pending further information from the Ministry of Education.

New Equity Advisory Circle
In 2020/21 the Equity Advisory Circle was formed. A key focus this year was to build a network and connect people to collaborate and learn from each other. There were three meetings in the inaugural year, which saw us widen our connection to community and stakeholders through our partnerships with the North Bay and District Multi-Cultural Centre, QUILoud, Children’s Aid Society (OACAS), Ontario Educational Championship Team (OECT), Métis Nation North Bay, Parent Involvement Committee (PIC), Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), and the NNDSB First Nations Advisory Committee (FNAC).

Indigenous Education Advisory Circle (IEAC)
NNDSB has formal Education Service Agreements (ESA) with eight local First Nations. The board values the partnerships and the body of Indigenous knowledge that members of these communities have and are willing to share with NNDSB. The Indigenous Education Advisory Circle works to support the prioritizing, development and monitoring of the Board Action Plan for Indigenous Education. Working toward equitable outcomes for Indigenous students is the focus of the action plan including student achievement, well-being, transitions and safety, Indigenous parent and community engagement, as well as system and educator capacity building. The work of the IEAC as it relates to the Action Plan, helps the board to target resources and supports in ways that will continue to promote engagement and improve well-being and learning environments that encourage students to thrive and reach their full potential.

Indigenous Youth Education Advisory Circle
Each secondary school has youth representation on the Indigenous Youth Advisory Circle, ensuring that youth voice, interests and perspectives are heard, respected and valued. The Youth Advisory Circle works alongside school-based youth circles, Student Senate and the Indigenous Student Trustee to best reflect youth experiences, ideas, and goals to support the Board Action Plan for Indigenous Education and the school experience.

Honouring Tradition
To improve the work the board does in honouring the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, it was announced that NNDSB’s Board of Trustee meetings would include an opening prayer by an Elder. Tuesday June 15, 2021 marked the first meeting to be opened with a prayer in Anishinaabemowin which was given by Elder June Commanda of Nipissing First Nation. In her translation, she said she thanked Creator for today, this life, and everything Mother Earth provides us with – water, plants, food and medicines. She thanked Creator for the gift of life and helping us to be brave and strong-hearted.

Trustees and Executive Team Offered PD in Human Rights
Trustees and members of the executive team were invited to participate in the Intensive Program in Human Rights for School Board Leaders offered through Osgood Professional Development. The session provided a foundational understanding of human rights standards and equity relevant to Ontario’s publicly-funded school boards, and principles of the province’s Human Rights Code, with a focus on addressing systemic inequality.

Improved Communications
Excellence in communications and excellence in relationships are key objectives for NNDSB. This means extensive work to repair, build and maintain long-standing partnerships and forge new relationships.

In 2021, the new communications team launched several initiatives aimed at improved communications including increased frequency of media releases (media monitoring is taking place), enhanced social media activity (with tracking of analytics to measure engagement), the “In the News” updates, the “In the Works feature” which highlights roles and positions in the board, and an initiative launched in September that amplifies the student voice in NNDSB communications.

Additionally, the Board Highlights document is shared with staff and stakeholders as well as media to share the news and decisions of the Board, and the Director’s monthly staff newsletter provides updates about Board and senior administrative decisions. All communications follow our new and strategic communications protocol which ensures clear, clean, and timely communication to all stakeholders.
Survey Shows NNDSB Earning Stakeholder Trust

Data gathered in surveys taken after each of the six virtual Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP) sessions indicated that NNDSB has begun to earn stakeholder trust, as respondents stated the board has come a long way in building trust and cautioned the board to maintain a focus on excellence in relationships.

The MYSP has four priority areas: excellence in teaching and learning, excellence in communication, excellence in relationships and excellence in innovation. Excellence in teaching and learning was identified as the priority area that was most important to the greatest number of survey respondents. Excellence in relationships was identified most often as the area in which NNDSB needed improvement. Excellence in teaching and learning and excellence in communication were tied for the areas in which most respondents thought NNDSB was performing best.

New Registration Process

Beginning March 8, NNDSB’s new online registration process is a move towards an inclusive and equitable registration process that demonstrates excellence in relationships, communication and innovation. Updates to the registration form include the option of non-binary choices, including non-disclosed and self-identified under the gender section. This follows a school community survey conducted in 2019 titled This is Us. There is a space on the registration form to reflect any student’s chosen identity. The report on the new process states, “students should feel welcomed and accepted; registering a self-identified gender should be as easy as registering a binary gender type”.

The form now allows for the selection of the language stream the student is entering, with a drop-down menu for the selection of English, French immersion, and extended French. Sections of the form now reflect the acceptance of digital documentation. Parents and guardians can attach photos of the student’s proof of age and proof of address. Digital signatures are acceptable. These modifications, approved by legal counsel, will alleviate the need for identification to be seen and verified by school staff. Additionally, the new form can be utilized by students registering in elementary and secondary schools. This approach streamlines the process. Rather than submission to a central location which is forwarded to schools, parents and guardians will now email the complete package to the secretary at the student’s school.

Summer Learning Program Recognized Provincially

NNDSB was recognized provincially by the Council of Directors of Education (CODE) for the successful work of last year’s summer learning program. The board’s outcomes were combined with those from eight other school boards for a report submitted to the Ministry of Education by CODE. The report showed how summer learning successfully supports Ontario’s vulnerable students and their families from all regions of the province. Summer 2021, and for several years previous, NNDSB facilitated a technology-enabled distance learning program combined with small group learning experiences that promoted resilience, well-being and social interaction, while improving literacy and numeracy skills through fun and engaging activities.

NNDSB Policy Implementation Lauded

NNDSB’s successful implementation of a vaccination policy using a third-party app Thrive Health, has been recognized by the app provider. The app provider has recognized the board for developing a procedure that is one of the most effective across Canada. Thrive Health has reached out to see if NNDSB would support the Government of the Northwest Territories by sharing the board’s approach. The work demonstrates the board’s strategic commitment to excellence in innovation. We are proud of the human resources and information technology departments under the leadership of Superintendent of Business Seija Van Haesendonck for their work that has brought national recognition to the board.

District-wide PSW program launched

The launch of the personal support worker (PSW) living classroom program, has secured partners in Sturgeon Falls, North Bay, Mattawa and Parry Sound.

The program will see participants 18 and older train to become PSWs in a classroom that is located in a healthcare facility. Rather than having to wait for placement modules to practice theoretical learning, students will be able to register and seamlessly move between the theoretical and practical application of knowledge. Participant intake is under way, with program registration taking place in January. The program is planned to begin in February 2022.

In addition to becoming a fully-trained PSW, students who have not yet completed their Grade 12 can earn up to six credits towards their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

This collaborative program demonstrates the board’s commitment to align itself with the pillars of the Multi-Year Strategic Plan. The PSW program can be situated within the board’s commitment to excellence in innovation, excellence in teaching and learning, and excellence in relationships.