

St. John's College

BRANT HALDIMAND NORFOLK CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Student population: 1233; Grades: 9–12; Principal: Rob Campbell

St. John's College is a Grades 9 to 12 school located in Brantford, Ontario. This school of over 1200 students reflects a fairly average demographic spread in its economic makeup and special-education population. The focus of this success story is in the area of Grade 9 mathematics. Today, the school is scoring significantly above board and provincial results in applied math, and the school and board are scoring above the provincial results in academic math. These scores reflect a significant growth—especially in the area of applied math—and are the result of strategic initiatives.

Principal Rob Campbell states: “Our data showed us that there were specific areas that we needed to focus upon in order to improve the success rate of our students. There was a need to collaborate and listen to the teachers and to draw upon their expertise. The administration lent their support to the initiatives that emerged from these discussions.”

The wealth of information provided in the EQAO reports has been instrumental in providing the school with reliable and multi-faceted data. In addition to examining the scores and analyzing board and provincial results, the school honed in on individual questions and items and studied Student Questionnaire responses. Frequent meetings and discussions concerning this data were held with special-education teachers and intermediate-division staff from the 10 elementary schools that feed into St. John's College, and provided a valid basis for change.

An initial strategy for success was to work with the students and elementary staff members to guide students in their course selections. At St. John's, “alert” meetings are now frequently held so that, if necessary, students experiencing difficulty can be rerouted within two weeks after the start of each semester.

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EQAO data alerted St. John's staff members to the fact that multiple-choice questions were an area of weakness for students, especially those in the applied math strand. Also, measurement, an area that was thought to be solid, produced results that raised concerns. The school responded immediately by producing banks of multiple-choice questions that mirrored EQAO questions and organized them by strand and question type. These were highlighted throughout the term and became a diagnostic tool before and after the units that were taught. Students learned how to process these questions and find the correct solution. As well, they didn't leave any questions unanswered in their work. Similarly, the unit on measurement was researched, and with the effective teaching strategies that were used—including co-operative learning techniques, use of open questioning, problem-solving-based lessons and use of up-to-date technology—the unit showed immediate improvement.

St. John's College has taken advantage of initiatives sponsored by the board. The Math Coaching project was designed to improve teaching pedagogy and share strategies. A math coach was assigned to teach at St. John's College and also collaborate with peers and teachers from feeder schools. Through observation, discussion, collaboration, co-planning and co-teaching, effective strategies were developed and aligned throughout both panels. This successful project was extended to include ongoing professional development sessions. Dr. Marian Small provided input on big ideas in mathematics, differentiated instruction through open questioning, parallel tasks, learning goals, success criteria and assessment. This initiative has spread to other families of schools.

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Student

In addition to these efforts, St. John's College provides ongoing support for student success in mathematics. There is a lunchtime Help Room for Math held Monday through Thursday and an After-School Homework Club. These programs provide opportunities for re-teaching concepts, working on questions or taking advantage of a quiet place to concentrate on homework—all useful and relevant provisions that mean a great deal to St. John's College students. Says one student: “This encourages us not to give up. We appreciate the help that we are given at lunch and after school and enjoy the way that technology provides variety and interest in mathematics. It brings [math] to life. Math is difficult, but if I keep trying, I do well.”

The special-education staff members have provided a great deal of support by visiting classes and offering assistance to students in the applied classes as well as wherever else it is needed.

Information is also made available to parents around the EQAO assessment. This enables them to become part of the success equation at St. John's College.

While Principal Campbell is quick to acknowledge his innovative staff and the successful initiatives that have been undertaken, administrative support has been an important component in the excellent performance of the school. By highlighting mathematics in morning announcements, celebrating successes at a pep rally and finding time to visit classes, he has contributed the personal support that has raised the profile of math at the school. This support has been extended so that budget allotments have provided the appropriate technological aids (such as iPads, LCD projectors and Smart Boards) to complement teaching initiatives.

Attention to data, creative planning and focused initiatives have brought about significant improvement in pure and applied math at St. John's College. This team has created a positive learning environment and is enjoying great successes in the field of mathematics.

GRADE 9 STUDENT POPULATION

	ACADEMIC	APPLIED
Female	59%	41%
Male	41%	59%
Special education needs	4%	28%
English language learners	1%	1%
Speaks primarily a language other than English at home	3%	3%



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