

## **RCCDSB Believes in Me! Student Census**

November 2022

Dear Parents and Guardians,

At Renfrew County Catholic District School Board, we're committed to providing a warm, welcoming environment for all students, and are continuously working to improve our schools and remove barriers to students that may impact future success. For this to happen, we need to truly understand the needs of RCCDSB students and their families. To help us in this work, we will be launching our *RCCDSB Believes in Me Student Census* to our school communities to better understand our student population.

In 2022, the Board reanimated our mission and vision to reflect who we are today. We as a board are growing and we want to ensure our focus remains on what's important, the success and well-being of all RCCDSB students. Our key theme for the 2022-2023 school year is to recognize and remove barriers to create just and equitable opportunities for all. We recognize that we have work to do. Guided by our mission and vision, as a community of believers, we strive to nurture the well-being, self-worth, and potential of each individual. That is why the *RCCDSB Believes in Me Student Census* is so important to us. While this survey is completely voluntary and confidential, the answers that we receive will directly influence our actions and how we address barriers to student success.

In November, parents/guardians of students in kindergarten to grade 8 will receive a link to the Census through their individual RCCDSB email accounts and we hope that parents will complete it with, or on behalf, of their child/children. Secondary students will also receive the Census through their RCCDSB email but will be given time to complete the Census in class.

While many questions are mandated by the Government of Ontario and the Ministry of Education, there may be additional questions related to how your child feels at school, if they feel represented in their learning, as well as socioeconomic-related questions. The additional perceptual questions were decided upon by our Demographic Student Census Steering committee. The committee includes various different department leads, including Mental Health, Indigenous Education, Religious Education, and other experienced personnel to help determine the questions that we include. After many discussions, we decided upon the perceptual questions that we believe will assist us the best when trying to identify discrimination and inequalities in our School Board.

The Census will take around 20 minutes to complete. If you have multiple children in kindergarten to grade 8, you will be asked to complete a Census for each child.

The Census findings will assist our Board and schools to:

- Better understand our student population and school communities
- Identify barriers to student success and well-being, including barriers to equity and inclusion in schools
- Inform new and existing instructional programming and supports to better support the achievement and well-being of RCCDSB students

- Better understand the environment in our schools and how this may impact student success

The Student Census is mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education, and every school Board must complete a Student Census by 2023. The Student Census is confidential, but not anonymous. The students' names will not be identifiable as each student will have a unique alphanumeric code that only key board personnel would be able to link to the name. The information will be stored in a secure, safe database and will only be accessible to authorized researchers for the purpose of understanding our student populations and how we can better serve them in our schools. The RCCDSB is committed to the highest levels of privacy and confidentiality in collecting information about students and follows all privacy requirements outlined in the [Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act \(MFIPPA\)](#). The information gathered through the *Student Census* is collected under the legal authority of the [Education Act \(R.S.O. 1990, c. E. 2, as amended\)](#) for educational and research purposes only.

Participation in the Student Census is voluntary, however, we encourage you to take the time to complete the Census as the data will directly benefit students in the future. The higher the completion rate, the greater impact this will have on school improvement, programming and environments.

Parents & guardians have the option of completing the attached opt-out form. This means your child will not receive the link to the Census in their RCCDSB email, and will thus not complete the Census.

[Opt-Out Form](#)

If you have any questions or concerns, attached to this letter you will find a Frequently Asked Questions page. Please review the information provided prior to reaching out to the RCCDSB at [RCCDSBbelievesinme@rccdsb.ca](mailto:RCCDSBbelievesinme@rccdsb.ca).

As always, we thank you for your continued support. The RCCDSB strives to provide a warm, welcoming, and safe environment for all students. Participation in the Census will assist us in our continuous efforts to improve our schools to better accommodate all students.

**Yours in Catholic Education,**

**Mark Searson**

## **Frequently Asked Questions:**

### **What is the purpose of the RCCDSB Believes in Me student demographic census?**

The Demographic Student Census is mandated by the Ministry of Education. Every school Board in Ontario must complete a student census by 2023. This information will be used to ensure we are addressing any possible barriers to students' education at RCCDSB. Many of the questions on the census are mandated by the Ministry of Education.

As a part of our Mission and Vision, we strive to recognize and remove barriers to student success. By completing the student census, we will be able to create action plans based on the responses from our school community. This information will help us overcome any potential barriers to student success at RCCDSB and maintain school environments characterized by warmth, hospitality, good humour and joy.

### **Why is identity-based data being collected?**

As a result of the [Ontario Anti-Racism Act, 2017, S.O. 2017, c.15](#) and [Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan](#), School Boards received a mandate to collect and report on identity-based data (ethnic origin, race, Indigenous identity, and religion). The purpose of this collection of data is to identify and eliminate any discriminatory practices and barriers faced by students in our schools. The RCCDSB is committed to offering and sustaining safe school environments characterized by warmth, hospitality, good humour, and joy. We want to ensure that all students feel welcome and address any barriers that students face.

Once the census is complete, we will be reviewing the data collected and determine what barriers students are facing in our schools. This falls in line with our vision as we strive to recognize and remove barriers to create just and equal opportunities for all. Once we have critical information, the RCCDSB can begin working on action plans to eliminate discrimination and barriers to student success. This is one of the many steps our Board is taking to ensure safe school environments. We are continuously working to ensure all students feel safe and welcome at the Renfrew County Catholic District School Board.

### **Who is completing the RCCDSB Believes in Me student census?**

For students in grades K-8, a parent/guardian will complete the census with, or on behalf of, their child. Students in grades 9-12 will be given time in class to complete the census. If you

are a parent/guardian of a secondary student, you will receive an Opt-Out Form for the census. This means your child will not receive a link to the census and will not complete it in class.

### **Why should my child participate in this census?**

The collection of this information is critical to understanding our student population. If we do not know who makes up our community, it is more difficult to address these to eliminate inequalities in our schools. We know that systemic racism is prevalent in Ontario, and it is important for us to gather student demographic data to ensure that all students are treated equally and that bias and discrimination are eliminated in our schools. That is why we are encouraging all students to participate. We want to know how they feel in school and the areas where we can improve as a school system. By participating in the census, you can help us create equal and just opportunities for all RCCDSB students.

### **What does it mean when it says the census is confidential, but not anonymous?**

The Student Census is confidential, but not anonymous. The students' names will not be identifiable as each student will have a unique alphanumeric code that only key Board personnel would be able to link to the name. The information will be stored in a secure, safe database and will only be accessible to authorized researchers for the purpose of understanding our student populations and how we can better serve them in our schools. No data or names of individual students will be made public.

### **What questions are on the census?**

The questions on the census will include topics such as student identity, school climate, family characteristics, gender identity, sexual orientation, and student well-being. There will be three versions of the census: one for K-4, 5-8 and another for grades 9-12. This is because we want to ensure we follow the curriculum and only ask questions on topics that students would have discussed in class.

### **Do parents/guardians/students need to answer every question on the census?**

No, you will not need to answer all of the questions. If there are questions you'd prefer not to answer, simply leave them blank and continue to the next question.

### **Is it mandatory to complete the demographic student census?**

It is not mandatory to complete this census, however, the more responses we receive the better we can evaluate any potential barriers to students and address them to ensure we provide students with the support they need.

### **When will students be completing the Student Census?**

The Demographic Student Census will launch in November 2022. Students in grades 9-12 will have a chance to complete the Census in class during the first week of November. Parents and guardians will receive an information package through the *School Messenger* system in October. The package will include an opt-out form for parents/guardians of secondary students. If you do not want your child to complete the Census, we ask that you complete the opt-out form. This means the student would not receive a link to the census through their RCCDSB email. Prior to the official launch of the Census, we will send notice to secondary students and their parent/guardians. Additionally, we hope to provide access to computers/reliable internet at Parent-Teacher conferences for parents who are completing the Census for students in K-8 and do not have reliable internet access at home.

### **How were the questions on the census developed?**

While many questions are mandated by the Government of Ontario and the Ministry of Education, there may be additional questions related to how your child feels at school, if they feel represented in their learning, as well as socioeconomic-related questions. The additional perceptual questions were decided upon by our Demographic Student Census Steering committee. The committee includes various different department leads, including Mental Health, Indigenous Education, Religious Education, and other experienced personnel to help determine the questions that we include. After many discussions, we decided upon the perceptual questions that we believe will assist us the best when trying to identify discrimination and inequalities in our School Board. It is also important to note that we have met with various stakeholder groups to make them aware of the Student Census and its purpose, and gathered feedback from each group to take into consideration when building the RCCDSB Believes in Me Student Census.

**If you have any further questions, please contact [RCCDSBbelievesinme@rccdsb.ca](mailto:RCCDSBbelievesinme@rccdsb.ca)**

## **FAMILIES OF SCHOOLS**

### **Renfrew/Arnprior Schools**

- Our Lady of Fatima, Renfrew
- St. Thomas the Apostle, Renfrew
- St. Joseph's, Calabogie
- St. Joseph's, Arnprior
- St. John XXIII, Arnprior
- St. Michael's, Douglas
- St. Joseph's High School, Renfrew
- Valleycrest, Renfrew

### **Pembroke/Petawawa family of schools**

- Our Lady of Sorrows, Petawawa
- St. Francis of Assisi, Petawawa
- St. Anthony's, Chalk River
- St. Mary's, Deep River
- Holy Name, Pembroke
- Cathedral, Pembroke
- Our Lady of Lourdes, Pembroke
- Valleycrest, Pembroke
- St. Kateri Tekakwitha Virtual School
- Our Lady of Grace, Westmeath
- Bishop Smith Catholic High School, Pembroke

### **Madawaska family of schools**

- St. James, Eganville
- St. John Bosco, Barry's Bay
- George Vanier, Combermere
- St. Andrew's, Killaloe