



## **St Michael's High School**

**Community Learning Centre**

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## **St. Michael's High School**

**Community Learning Centre**

**Report to Stakeholders**

**June 2011**

**It has been a banner year for St. Michael's CLC! We are a viable English secondary school and will remain in service for many years to come!**

In the spring and fall of 2006, the Western Quebec School Board and the Council of Commissioners held public consultations to determine the future of St. Michael's High School. Key factors in this decision revolved around a decreasing enrollment and the fact that we did not have a regulation size gymnasium. As all students of the W.Q.S.B. must be offered the same resources, this was a difficult challenge to overcome.

At the two town hall meetings during this time, community support was overwhelming and a positive approach was the standard. The entire community felt that the closure of St. Michael's would have an extremely detrimental effect on the town of Low and the surrounding municipalities. Past and current students assured the commissioners that our Outdoor education program more than made up for our lack of a gymnasium as our surroundings made many outdoor activities possible. Due in great part to the show of support for and the academic improvements of St. Michael's High School, it was decided by the Council of Commissioners to offer a five year period in which to increase enrollment and fully develop our Outdoor Education program which would compensate for the lack of a proper gym.

In November of 2007, St. Michael's took on the challenge of becoming a Community Learning Centre School to fully develop the relationships already existing and to improve the lives of all community members. At this time we also approached the W.Q.S.B. to transport students to our school from the east and south as we were only provided

with bussing from the north and west. Our Board assured us that transportation would be provided should we have certain numbers of students coming from various directions. Through school promotion and maintaining high academic standards, St. Michael's enrollment increased from 54 students in 06-07 to 81 students in 07-08. Since that time, our enrolment has fluctuated but never gone below 81 students each year. As a Community Learning Centre school, the community has assisted our Outdoor education program through material donations, financial contributions and volunteer time.

At an April 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011 meeting, Mr. Mike Dawson, the Director General of the W.Q.S.B., assured our staff and community members that, "The closure of St. Michael's is not on the table." He went on to say that future discussions would revolve around the age of our building and the lack of a proper gymnasium. He indicated that this would require public consultation and would begin sometime in future years. This was extremely fantastic news for all concerned as we had been working very hard over the last several years to ensure the survival of our school.

Our CLC Steering Committee had addressed the issue of fundraising to build a new gym from their first meeting in March of 2008, but had voted to maintain the status quo until June 2011 when the issue of school closure was decided. Our partners have already begun to discuss the types of fundraising needed to build a school and community gymnasium. The first meeting in September of 2012 will initiate this endeavor.

### **Activities**

Since the inception of St. Michael's CLC, many activities have been organized and continued through the school years. They have become part of the fabric of our community and have enabled our students to enjoy many more opportunities throughout their high school career.

- Free arena time for 20 hockey practices, two tournaments, broomball during Phys. Ed., lunch hour figure skating or intramural broomball, skating during After School Activities every Wednesday. In return, students and staff have volunteered at the arena for tournaments, spring cleanup and closure as well as volunteering at the Arena's largest yearly fundraiser golf tournament every July.

- Internet Café – Community members and students have become used to the availability of High Speed Internet every Monday and Wednesday evening. Attendance continues to be consistent with at least six community members attending each session. Unexpected benefits continue to amaze the coordinator as community members offer time or materials to support the school. Many more community members are now comfortable being in the building and also attend other events because of this. Regularly attending students assist seniors with computer use and it is a pleasure to see this type of interaction.
- Quilting Club – Local Ladies meet at school every Wednesday evening and have produce three hand stitched quilts which were donated to the local arena, St. Michael's and Queen Elizabeth Elementary schools to be used for fundraising. In addition, one of the ladies offers her services every Tuesday at lunch for students who wish to learn these skills.
- Gatineau River Clean Up – Staff, Students and community members enjoy a day on the Gatineau River cleaning up garbage. Students travel in canoes (donated by local company) to islands and pick up garbage (Plastic gloves donated by the CSSS) and put it in garbage bags (donated by the Municipality of Low) which are left on the island to be picked up by community volunteers in motor boats. This has become a yearly activity and participants have reported that there is less garbage each year which may indicate a growing awareness of environmental issues.
- Canoe Races – With the assistance of the local canoe companies, St. Michael's Gatineau River Race has grown to include five schools. Canoes are donated for this event which takes place every September.
- Remembrance Day – Working with the Community, St. Michael's CLC hosts a Remembrance Day ceremony at the local Heritage Hall which is catered by local seniors and St. Michael's Home Economics Club. In the past, local veterans are interviewed and their stories are presented in song, poem or slide shows by senior students. Due to a decreasing number of surviving veterans, our carpentry teacher, Mr. Greig and the carpentry class created 152 crosses with the names, dates of birth and death as well as home town of each of the fallen

Canadian soldiers in the Afghanistan conflict. It was such a moving tribute, that many participants took pictures and sent them to soldiers presently stationed in Afghanistan. Members of the Theatre Wakefield troupe in attendance also asked to collaborate on Remembrance Day ceremonies in November 2012. A grant proposal (supported by a letter from St. Michael's CLC coordinator) was submitted in January of 2011 to develop an oral history project focusing on military activities of those who live in our surrounding communities.

- Christmas Dinner – Our annual Christmas dinner at the local Heritage hall was held on Thursday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010. St. Michael's CLC uses this event as an opportunity to thank many of our community partners for their support of the school throughout the year. Parents provide the materials for a complete turkey dinner while our cooking club baked many desserts. Invited guests included members of the CSSS, the Municipality of Low, the school commissioner and local business people who have been great supporters of St. Michael's. As usual, a great time was had by all!
- Christmas Baskets for the less fortunate – St. Michael's CLC partnered with the CSSS and three seniors clubs to make Christmas food and gift baskets for the less fortunate. Ten families including 28 children were very grateful to receive the complete ingredients for a turkey dinner (as well as other food stuffs) and gifts that were purchased specifically for the child's gender and age. Students brought non-perishables from home and helped to prepare the many boxes.
- Oral History Projects – During our first two full years as a CLC, Oral History projects were completed with the help of Theatre Wakefield. The Hidden Hills Radio Hour can be seen at [www.ourhiddenhills.ca](http://www.ourhiddenhills.ca) In the 2010-2011 school year, the focus was on interviewing and recording the stories of those seniors who do not attend senior activities and generally remain in their homes. The oral histories will be made available on the Fairburn House website which has a large archive of recorded history. This project will continue into the 2011-2012 school year.

- 5/30 Challenge – The 5/30 Challenge is a project to promote eating five servings of fruits and vegetables per day and exercising for at least 30 minutes each day. Our local CSSS worked with school staff to educate students about the contents of popular drinks and to encourage students to make wise choices. A healthy life style is considered to be a major factor in academic success and these types of activities will continue each year.
- Theatre Wakefield – The developing association that is enjoyed by St. Michael's with Theatre Wakefield has netted many benefits for the students and community alike. Students have enjoyed workshops to assist with interviewing and development of programming, projects such as the Hidden Hills and the opportunity to attend film making workshops in the summer. St. Michael's CLC has hosted live plays that are available to the community which promotes the Arts in our area. We look forward to our continuing relationship and will begin work on the Remembrance Day ceremonies in November of 2012.
- After School Activities - St. Michael's, working with our local CSSS and Low Lion's Club, received a grant from Quebec en Forme and Ado en Sante to provide transportation and animation for After School Activities. This had never been possible at our school before due to the exorbitant cost of transportation. Students are dropped off at one of three elementary schools to the north, east and south of St. Michael's CLC at approximately 5:30p.m., where they meet their ride home every Wednesday after school. After a six week trial in the 2009-2010 school year, this program started in October of 2010 and ended in April of 2011. Student requests added a Music Club and Cooking Class to the existing activities including: Homework Club, French Tutoring, Martial Arts and Skating Club. 52% of our students participated and they were encouraged to try various activities to determine their interests. These types of programs also encourage a greater connection to the school and may reduce dropout rates. St. Michael's CLC will continue to work on the After School Activities committee to upgrade existing equipment at school.
- Senior's Groups – St. Michael's CLC's staunchest supporters are without a doubt the members of the various senior's organizations in our areas. Collaborations are recurring each year (Canada Day, Remembrance Day, Christmas Dinner, fundraising) and a mutual

respect and admiration has grown between students and seniors. The coordinator has become a source of information distribution for the amalgamated seniors group comprised of groups from 7 different communities. Technology is still a mystery to many seniors and the coordinator is happy to print e-mails and posters for distribution. The St. Michael's Choir has performed at the annual Anglican, Catholic, United Church group Christmas Dinner and at a monthly seniors dinner to very appreciative audiences. The Choir members were given small stuffed animals by the seniors at the Christmas dinner, which were donated by **all** choir members to the Christmas Baskets for the less fortunate. The seniors also assist with our fundraising efforts by baking or selling tickets for the CLC. Their willingness to assist the school is ongoing and amazing!

- CLC Fundraising – Our CLC raffled the hand stitched quilt made by our quilting ladies and raised \$1,424.00 for literacy and the Arts at St. Michael's. The school now receives 20 popular magazines each month which will be used in class and as rewards to students who continually put forth their best efforts in school. The remainder of the profits will be used for materials for the arts in September 2011. The next CLC fundraiser was in direct response to student requests for more fun while they fundraised. A "Talent Show" was held on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and netted a total of \$842.00 which will be used for our After School Activities program. Although the profits were not as high as we hoped, the pride and sense of accomplishment of our students more than made up for this. This is certainly to become an annual fundraiser at St. Mike's CLC!
- Quebec Tourism – The municipalities of Low, Kazabazua, Alleyn – and-Cawood and Lac Ste. Marie joined forces on Saturday, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2011 in showcasing all they had to offer. A bus travelled outside our areas and brought people interested in seeing what the communities had to offer to the various municipalities. St. Michael's CLC had a kiosk at the municipal hall that had many visitors asking about our activities and events. We hope this will increase tourism in our area or interest others in living here. This may become an annual event.
- Video Conferencing – many video conferences took place at the school in the 2010-2011 school year. Some were geared to students during the day while many others were offered to the community for

personal or business improvements. The Quebec Farmer's Association began conferencing with other English farmers throughout Quebec to share best practices and to inform and update members. Monthly meetings will be held throughout the upcoming school year. Many more teachers are utilizing the technology for class instruction and report greater student participation. St. Michael's principal and coordinator will work during the 2011-2012 school year to upgrade the present furniture in the video conference room. Most of the existing desks have served three generations of students and are in various states of disrepair. With modular furniture, teachers will have choices when conducting classes (students work alone or in small or large groups) and St. Michael's CLC will be able to charge a reasonable rate to groups who use the system.

### **Summary**

- With the assurance of our school board that St. Michael's will remain open, the coordinator's job will encompass the organization of a committee to begin fundraising for a gymnasium. Our steering committee does not want to postpone this activity as a gymnasium is a necessity for our school's survival and a wonderful opportunity for community members to live healthier lives.
- At the same time, we will improve the facilities in our video conferencing room to ensure that we can charge comparable rates to businesses that wish to utilize the system.
- We will also update the facilities in our kitchen as the stove only has one working element and refrigerator has already been repaired twice. The kitchen has become as much a meeting place as a facility for our students to learn how to cook.
- The coordinator is often overwhelmed by suggestions, requests and proposals by local community members and partners throughout the school year. It was decided that all will be asked to take part in fundraisers for the construction of a new gymnasium as that will be the focus for our CLC until this dream is realized.

Our community members do not recognize the difference between the school and the community learning centre. When referring to one, they are referring to both. There have been many instances in which it becomes clear that a sort of bartering system is preferable in this area. For example, a local farmer has the coordinator fax farming forms to the government and then brings bales of hay to the school for our Scarecrow competition at Halloween. Our local Skating Club meets in our kitchen and then places a large ad in their annual program about our Open House dates and times at no charge. There are a myriad of small exchanges such as this done over the year. Our CLC has cemented relationships and enjoyed sharing assets with many new and existing partners. Without a coordinator, however, many of the coordinator tasks would fall to the principal who already has a full complement of jobs. Undoubtedly, the Community Learning Centre has had a positive impact on programming at school and on the social development of community members. The “spirit” of community is alive and well in Low and surrounding municipalities. With our survival assured, it will be a pleasure to operate and improve upon our St. Michael’s High School Community Learning Centre in the coming years.