

OCDSB Student Trustees' Annual Report

 2024-2025

June 2025

Student Trustees' Annual Report: 2024-2025

1.0 Introduction

The position of Student Trustee was first introduced in 1999, when the government mandated student representatives on school boards across Ontario. In 2006, the Education Act would officially establish the role as it is known today. 25 years in, these student representatives continue to shape the future of public education within every school board in the province. Student Trustees act as a liaison between student bodies and board governance, ensuring student concerns from the over 78,000 students in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board—and together, the over 2.2 million students in Ontario—are heard.

Elected by the students of the board, the Student Trustees for the 2024-2025 academic year are Jeffrey Zhang, Sharanya Sivasathiyathan, and Ezio De Stefano. This year marks the first year in which three Student Trustees fulfilled their roles, up from two in previous years with the introduction of the Indigenous Student Trustee position (Student Trustee De Stefano). Jeffrey Zhang is a Grade 12 student at Earl of March S.S., Sharanya Sivasathiyathan is a Grade 12 student at John McCrae S.S., and Ezio De Stefano is also a Grade 12 student at John McCrae S.S.

For more information on Student Trustees, please refer to Policy P.017.GOV: Student Trustees and Section 55 of the Education Act.

The OCDSB Student Trustees' Report serves to inform the Board of Trustees, staff, and students about the work Student Trustees have undertaken throughout the year. This year's report outlines advocacy initiatives, Student Senate work, and provincial advocacy at the Ontario Student Trustees' Association.

2.0 Student Senate

The Student Senate is the official committee representing secondary students' views in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. Made up of one Senior Senator and one Junior Senator per secondary site, as well as the three Student Trustees and other senior staff, the group of around 50 elected student leaders serves to bring student voice to the table. At monthly meetings hosted at the Board Office, the Student Senate discusses current concerns, advises senior staff, trustees, and Student Trustees on ongoing initiatives, and collaborates on various projects. Student Senators are tasked with regular outreach with their peers, hosting town hall meetings and collecting feedback on board events.

The Student Senate is incredibly grateful for all of the support and advice provided by senior staff. Special thanks to Vice Principal Julie Prankard, Vice Principal Ann Arden, Superintendent Prince Duah, and Samah Suliman for all of their ongoing support.

This year, the Senate has been able to consult on the board's Elementary Program Review, the use of Artificial Intelligence in classrooms, the Board Priority Learning Plan, and many other developments at the board level. The Senate is grateful for these opportunities to highlight the student voice and would like to thank every Senator, staff member, and OCDSB student for their passion, participation, and hard work in fulfilling the Senate's goals.

2.1 Student Senators

The 2024-2025 OCDSB Student Senate

School	Senior Senator (Gr.11/12)	Junior Senator (Gr.9/10)
AY Jackson SS	Tianxu Dong	June Xie
Bell HS	Alyssa Hu	Victoria Cotado
Brookfield HS	Asma Raouf	Judy El-Khalili
Cairine Wilson SS	Owen Murphy	Sean Rasooli
Canterbury HS	Caitlin Arden	Elynn Zeng
Colonel By SS	Hayel Abu-Hamdan	Ted Yang
Earl of March SS	Aarya Bhatt	Derek Chuah
Frederick Banting Alt	Sara Saleh	Violet Morgan
Glebe CI	Quynh-Le Nguyen	Noah Parsons
Gloucester HS	Olivia Hawrylak	Rachel Mekis
Hillcrest HS	Rebecca Doherty	Amelia Patacairk
John McCrae SS	Chaimaa Amachki	Gavin Wu
Lisgar CI	Sami Ghazlani	Dabi Kennedy
Longfields Davidson Heights SS	Gloria Wen	N/A
Maplewood SS	Danika Neal	Zachary Boyd
Merivale HS	Skyler Ma	Vivian Wang
Nepean HS	Ali Al Hasan	Jackson Telka
Osgoode Township HS	N/A	Alister Denison
Ottawa Technical SS	Isabelle Campbell	Taylor McKenzie-Corneau
Ridgemont HS	Moqadasa Mahmood Big	Hassan El-Khatib Leia Kardaras
Sir Robert Borden HS	Leah Freedhoff	Linh Ngo
Sir Wilfrid Laurier SS	Arnesh Sanjeevan	Theo Dupuy
South Carleton HS	Noor Abdullah	Lexi Troughton
West Carleton SS	Carter Stedman	Sandy Ma

2.2 Student Senate Subcommittees

The Student Senate provides opportunities for Student Senators to take leadership positions, allowing them to pursue projects of interest. Three Senate subcommittees were established, open to all Senators to join and led by two elected Senator Co-Chairs.

Subcommittee	Chairs
Policy	Tianxu Dong and Hayel Abu-Hamdan (AY Jackson S.S. and Colonel By S.S.)
Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion	Theo Dupuy and Gloria Wen (Sir Wilfrid Laurier S.S. and Longfields-Davidson Heights S.S.)
Outreach	Skyler Ma and Caitlin Arden (Merivale H.S. and Canterbury H.S.)

Each subcommittee developed and executed projects of their own. Examples of their work include the monthly Student Senate Newsletter, EDI Spotlights and Workshops, the district-wide Student Senate Survey project, and various other proposals. The Student Trustees are immensely grateful for the dedication and initiative shown by Senators over the course of the year, and look forward to the implementation of similar projects in the future.

Excerpts from the projects mentioned above are linked at the end of this report.

3.0 Advocacy

3.1 Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence and its usage is one of the most pressing concerns currently facing education. Consulting with other Student Trustees and learning about initiatives taking place in peer school boards, Student Trustee Zhang and Student Trustee Sivasathiyathan decided that it was important for the OCDSB to tackle ethical AI usage and provide clarity for students. The goal was to ensure that student voices were heard in creating a policy that focused on educating students about, and not just regulating, the use of AI as a beneficial tool that empowers education.

The Student Trustees would then consult with both students and educators, and these conversations would highlight uncertainty in how to effectively use AI and when it is

allowed, but also a belief that AI will transform the future of education and the workplace. Consultations with the Student Senate with senior staff concerning the development of a board AI plan would echo these viewpoints. With these perspectives, Student Trustee Zhang and Student Trustee Sivasathiyathan would take their advocacy to the media, being featured on CBC Radio's *All In A Day* show in October and being focused on CBC articles on both the local and national level. Through these opportunities, the Student Trustees underscored the ways in which students are already using AI in their education, and how AI policies that educate students on beneficial AI use can equip them with the skills to thrive in the future.

While AI use in education is often framed as academically dishonest and a form of cheating, it is clear that it has its place as a beneficial tool in the classroom. As this technology advances, students must be educated on how they can leverage it in an ethical manner in the workplace and beyond. The Student Trustees look forward to the creation of progressive AI policies that enable the OCDSB's students with the skills to thrive.

3.2 Indigenous Youth Council

Aiming to establish a sustainable foundation so that the next Indigenous Student Trustee can build on these efforts.

Recognized challenges in promoting the council to students, particularly in reaching interested Indigenous students.

Exploring the potential to revisit the Original Voices Youth Council, an initiative that previously supported Indigenous student engagement.

Sought guidance and consultation from Kris Meawasige to understand past Indigenous student leadership opportunities.

3.3 Elementary Program Review (EPR)

At the Committee of the Whole on May 6th, Student Trustee Zhang and Student Trustee De Stefano (Student Trustee Sivasathiyathan was absent and unable to contribute) participated in a recorded vote. They both voted against the cuts to the Alternative Program and Special Education streams in the OCDSB outlined by the Elementary Program Review. This decision was made after Student Trustees Sivasathiyathan and De Stefano made classroom visits at their home site, John McCrae Secondary School, urging their peers to share their voice in the decision-making process by answering the publicly-available survey. The survey was also shared with the OCDSB Student Senate by staff during a monthly meeting prior to the decision made by the Student Trustees. Ultimately, the Student Senate and Student Trustees came to the conclusion that students deeply value the special education streams and alternative sites for their sense of support, belonging, and success. As a result, it is their hope that OCDSB staff and Trustees will continue to check in with students through avenues such as the Student

Senate and publicly-available surveys to assess the quality and accuracy of their decisions on the EPR moving forward.

4.0 OSTA-AECO Update

4.1 About

The Ontario Student Trustees' Association - l'Association des élèves conseillers et conseillères de l'Ontario (OSTA-AECO), is the largest official student stakeholder group in Canada. The organization is made up of student trustees from over 72 publicly funded school boards in the province, collectively representing Ontario's 2.2 million students. Since 2000, OSTA-AECO has held official stakeholder status from the Ministry of Education, providing valuable student voice directly to the heart of public education in collaboration with partner organizations.

For more information regarding OSTA-AECO, please refer to the OSTA-AECO [website](#).

During the 2024-2025 year, Student Trustee Jeffrey Zhang and Student Trustee Sharanya Sivasathiyathan had the privilege of serving on OSTA-AECO's Leadership Team, a group of 13 Student Trustees who determine the organization's direction and advocacy priorities. Student Trustee Zhang was appointed as Vice-President - Policy & Research, and Student Trustee Sivasathiyathan was elected as the Advocacy Interest Chair for Student Well-Being.

4.2 VP Policy & Research

Student Trustee Zhang served in this position on OSTA-AECO's Leadership Team, where he had a leadership role in writing and researching the organization's policy platform document. Spanning 35 recommendations over 30 pages, this document, titled *Vision 2030: Enriching the Student Experience*, covers a variety of policy recommendations to the Ministry of Education stemming from the concerns of the 2.2 million students the organization represents. From expanding school nutrition programs to improving mental health resources, Indigenizing curriculum, and strengthening special education funding, this project entailed extensive research on current issues in education and consultation with OSTA-AECO's general assembly, partner organizations, and other Student Trustees from a variety of school boards.

In his position, Student Trustee Zhang worked extensively on informing the organization's policy viewpoints and bringing a student-centred approach to its advocacy through the inclusion of first-hand student testimonies from all over the province. Student Trustee Zhang gained hands-on experience in drafting relevant and accurate policy recommendations that represent the students of the province through in-depth research and consultation. Although *Vision 2030* will not be published in his term, he looks forward to its publication in the next academic year.

4.3 Chair of Student Well-Being Advocacy Interest Group

Student Trustee Sivasathiyathan served in this position on OSTA-AECO's Leadership Team. The role entailed facilitating meetings of roughly 20 student trustees from across Ontario, brainstorming and enacting initiatives dedicated to the promotion of students' physical and mental well-being within school boards. In addition to meeting facilitation, Student Trustee Sivasathiyathan also held the unique privilege of connecting with organizations such as School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON), collaborating on the #HearNowON student involvement campaign and inviting representatives from the organization to speak directly to student trustees about implementation science at OSTA-AECO's Education Action Conference in Ottawa, in February of this year.

In her capacity as an Advocacy leader within the organization, leading the initiation of internal, organization-wide projects like the creation of a FLEX Days Mental Health Advocacy resource, she was also an outspoken leader on behalf of Ottawa students' experiences with the recent vaping and cellphone bans, as a member of the PPM-128 Task Force at the Ontario Ministry of Education. Student Trustee Sivasathiyathan appreciates the integral learning and development gained from this experience on the leadership team, and thanks the OCDSB staff who supported her throughout the process of attending meetings and participating in conferences.

4.4 Leadership Team and Conferences

Serving on the organization's Leadership Team, Student Trustees Zhang and Sivasathiyathan had the privilege of amplifying student voice at the provincial level, working with partner organizations and the Ministry of Education.

Student Trustee De Stefano was also part of OSTA-AECO's Indigenous Student Trustees Council, where she collaborated with other Student Trustees on issues important to Indigenous students in the province.

Additionally, the Student Trustees attended numerous OSTA-AECO conferences throughout the year, including the Fall General Meeting in November, the Education Action Conference in February, and the Annual General Meeting in May along with the incoming Student Trustees. These conferences provided opportunities for professional development, networking with fellow Student Trustees, and engagement in provincial-level advocacy.

Finally, Student Trustee Zhang and Sivasathiyathan attended numerous Leadership Team retreats throughout their terms, coordinating with members of the Leadership Team on advocacy projects, planning OSTA-AECO conferences, and participating in professional development.

5.0 Closing Remarks

Serving as an OCDSB Student Trustee over the past year has been one of the most challenging, yet rewarding experiences of my life. It has truly been an honour, and an immense privilege, to be trusted to represent the diverse students of the OCDSB.

Through the various responsibilities of this role, I have learned so much about what leadership and representation means at a large scale, and how being a leader means standing up for those who may not be able to. Whether I found myself in the boardroom (both in-person and online), at Toronto conferences, or in Student Senate meetings, I have hosted meetings, talked to partners, and advocated for causes in ways that I would have never been comfortable doing just a year ago. And even though it feels like my time in this position has come and gone in a flash, I leave my term as Student Trustee as a more confident and capable leader.

But my exceptional experience over the past year is only possible because of the amazing support I have received. Thank you to Vice-Principal Prankard, Superintendent Duah, Samah Suliman, Vice-Principal Arden, Chantelle Olson, Amanda Presley, Lyra Evans, Darren Gatley, the OCDSB Board of Trustees, Senior Staff, the members of the 2024-2025 Student Senate, and the OCDSB Co-Presidents Council. And of course, thank you to the students of the OCDSB for the privilege of representing you. Our work would not be possible without this support, and I am immensely grateful.

Throughout the past year, I have seen the board work tirelessly to place student concerns at the forefront of their decisions. Trustees and staff dedicate themselves to improving the student experience every single day, and I have come to appreciate their contributions to a strong public education system and its impact on society.

As the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board continues to navigate its mandate, sometimes encountering difficult decisions and compromises, I encourage, and trust, that it will always place students first. Because public education is meant to serve **all** students, empowering every single student to thrive.

With sincere gratitude,

Jeffrey Zhang

Student Senate Newsletter - May 2025 Recap

The [Student Senate](#) represents students' views to the OCDSB, meeting once per month to discuss key issues. There are two Student Senators at each secondary school; if you have any questions, reach out to them!

May Meeting Recap:

- 1) Elementary Program Review Approval
- 2) OCDSB Budget & Financial Investigation
- 3) Board Priority Learning Plan (BPLP)
- 4) Education Foundation of Ottawa Fundraiser
- 5) Subcommittee Updates

Elementary Program Review Approval

As of May 13th, certain recommendations of the Elementary Program Review have been approved, as voted on by the Board of Trustees. These recommendations include revisions to elementary program pathways, gradual phasing out of Middle French Immersion and Alternative programs, as well as changes to attendance boundaries and grade configurations, contributing to the OCDSB's commitment to more community-based education. It is important to note that the phasing out of Specialized Program Classes, including primary gifted programs, was not approved. All current specialized programs will still be offered. The OCDSB is developing a transitional plan that grants all possible requests for exemptions, and implementation preparation is currently set to begin in Spring 2026.

Read more at [Engage OCDSB](#) about the changes and site-specific transitional provisions!

OCDSB Budget & Financial Investigation

The Ministry of Education has launched a financial investigation into the OCDSB, citing budget deficits over the last four years. The OCDSB acknowledges these deficits and would like to state that these are related to the pandemic response efforts, retroactive payments to staff, as well as underfunding for staff replacements and specialized programs. The OCDSB is proactively working on plans for reductions in staffing

positions as well as program changes that will help better utilize resources. The OCDSB is committed to full accountability and transparency throughout this investigation and remains focused on providing high quality education for all students.

To learn more, visit [OCDSB Statement - Ministry Announcement](#), and [Engage OCDSB](#) for updates on next year's budget.

Board Priority Learning Plan

At the May Student Senate meeting, the Senate consulted with the OCDSB's Program Services department regarding the Board Priority Learning Plan, including the board's plans, actions, and observed impacts regarding student achievement. Some reported outcomes discussed were a slight decrease in secondary credit accumulation, improved reading benchmarks in early grades, and an increase in Indigenous students' performance but a decrease in multilingual students' performance on the OSSLT. Some actions discussed were implementing more progress monitoring tools in literacy and math, embedding Indigenous culture in learning, and expanding experiential learning opportunities like co-op in the curriculum. Senators shared their insights from their schools and provided suggestions regarding actions for the future.

Education Foundation of Ottawa Fundraiser

The OCDSB's Presidents' Council is continuing to plan a district-wide fundraising competition to support the Education Foundation of Ottawa (EFO). Throughout May, schools are competing in 5 balanced teams, each made up of 5 different schools across the city, to raise the most money for the EFO. If you'd like to be more involved, reach out to your school's student council to learn about how your school is participating!

Visit the [Education Foundation of Ottawa website](#) for more information.

Sub-Committee Updates

Policy

The Policy Sub-Committee is currently organizing a district-wide survey, collecting student experiences related to the Student Senate's past, current, and future initiatives. Look for it in your email in the coming weeks!

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI):

The EDI Sub-Committee is continuing to plan their EDI Spotlights on Instagram, highlighting important achievements made by students to EDI at their schools. Discussions on possible Senate diversity reps are also on their way.

Outreach

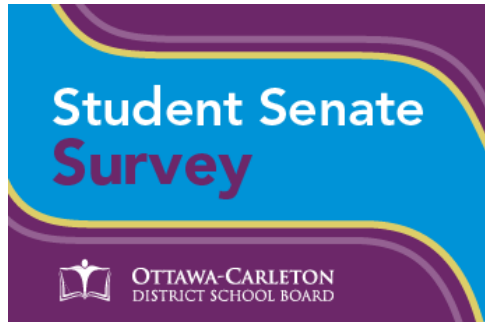
The Outreach Sub-Committee continues to provide the newsletter and all important information to the student body!

Reach out to [your Student Senators!](#)

APPENDIX B: Student Senate Survey

District News:

Student Senate Survey



The [Student Senate](#) is the official committee representing secondary students' views to the OCDSB. Each OCDSB secondary school elects two Student Senators (Junior and Senior) to serve on the senate for a two-year term.

Over the past few years, the Senate has been hard at work making a real difference for students across the District. From keeping students informed with the Student Senate Recap, to ensuring menstrual equality by supplying menstrual products in our schools, Student Senators have been actively shaping a better school experience.

Now, the Policy Subcommittee of the Student Senate wants to hear from Grade 9-12 students. They believe that student feedback is essential to truly represent the diverse needs and perspectives of the OCDSB student body when it comes to policies that directly impact them.

The Senate has launched a short, voluntary survey for all OCDSB students in Grades 9-12. The survey will ask about students' experiences with the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) and school-provided menstrual products, as well as their awareness of the Student Senate itself.

Student Senator Tianxu D., from A.Y. Jackson Secondary School, led the creation of the survey. "As Co-Chair of the OCDSB Student Senate Policy-subcommittee," says Tianxu, "launching this survey marks a significant step in honouring our legacy of student advocacy, while amplifying our voices to shape meaningful change. Our goal is to gather diverse student feedback that will guide our committee's next steps in building a stronger, more inclusive school community."

The link to complete the survey has been emailed to all eligible students and is available in the Student Portal. All students are encouraged to share their voice and help the Senate develop policies that impact students. The survey will close on June 13, 2025.

Student Portal:

Student Senate Survey

The Student Senate has launched a short, voluntary survey for students in Grades 9-12. The survey will ask about your awareness of the Student Senate and your experiences with the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) and school-provided menstrual products. This is your chance to share your voice and help the Senate develop policies that impact students. [Complete the survey.](#)

Standalone Email - content provided by Senate

Subject: Student Senate Survey



Hello everyone,

The Student Senate is conducting a survey for all OCDSB secondary students! Let us know about your experiences with free menstrual products, the OSSLT, and awareness of the Student Senate in your school.

Please take 5 minutes to complete the survey below.

Here's the link: [Student Senate Survey](#). The deadline to fill it out is June 13th.

Thanks,
Your Student Senators

Social Media:

Will be managed by Student Senate via their Instagram account.