Kingsway College School: Expanding What's Possible in Education

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Executive Summary

Kingsway College School (KCS) develops students as leaders in learning[1]. With expert instruction, student leadership, place-based learning, engagement with external experts, and entrepreneurship, KCS students engage in distinctly enriched learning and self-discovery. Our first Senior School graduating class in 2025 will be ready to thrive in post-secondary and beyond thanks to an experience that builds uncommon awareness of the world, the role each can play in shaping it, an extensive record of intrinsically motivated learning, and a legacy of creative impact. Evidence-based best practice with innovations for system alignment directly address widespread challenges in education and add synergy to optimize learning for KCS students.

[1] 'Leadership in learning' is defined at KCS as self-driven, principled, and difference-making. In the KCS Junior School, it is defined by the Habits of Mind, Body, and Action that permeate the school program. At the Senior School, it is defined by a curriculum framework that intentionally develops capacity, agency, and impact as well as the Leadership in Learning Skills of Insight, Ingenuity, and Integrity, all of which align with the Junior School curriculum and Habits.

In alignment with our mission to be a defining force in developing lifelong learners, this paper was authored to raise awareness, share solutions, and encourage other communities to likewise pursue and share their own so more children and youth reach their potential. This document provides the global forces which helped inform development of the KCS teaching and learning experience. It outlines the distinct features of the whole school, and in particular the new KCS Senior School, which have been introduced to best support student learning. It explains the benefits of the KCS model, including a broader array of student learning, added professional and organizational learning, a healthier school experience, and enhanced post-secondary preparation. The final section shares how parents can measure the quality of a school so indicators align with what schools are increasingly asked to achieve.

Background

Formal education has a considerable goal. It exists to help students grow so they can enjoy success and contribute to a healthy society. The gravity of global challenges and the implications these have for all mean schools need to achieve this to the greatest extent possible with every student. While the intent is sound, the design of mainstream education is increasingly, and in certain respects detrimentally, disconnected to this goal.

It should not be a surprise that features of an education system first conceived over a century ago may not support students' current and future success. Despite this, many of these features continue to control culture, experience, and achievement within the one institution that occupies the majority of one's formative years: standardized learning and assessment; age-based cohorting; reward and punishment as a dominant motivation paradigm; hours per course as a measure of learning; timetabling that works against deep learning; up to 14 years spent largely removed from the world outside school; and an adult-driven experience as chief among them. There are reasons why these features remain, but not the reasons widely assumed. Despite common opinion that this is just how school is done, and maybe even done best, many current features of mainstream schooling are not only not beneficial but actively work against what is.

The KCS Mission is to be a defining force in developing lifelong learners, one that inspires students and staff to reach our ultimate potential. KCS has a long record of collaboratively building a curriculum that is as optimized as possible for each student, both for their time at KCS and as a foundation for the entire future before them. The adoption of curriculum

mapping[2] in 2004 helped create a culture of organizational learning that asks every member of faculty to identify gaps, challenges, and opportunities in every subject area, and to work with colleagues and administration to address them. By living the school mission and sharing new practices through publication and inter school collaboration, staff work to help both the school and profession at large move closer to reaching its ultimate potential.

With continuous improvement as a school norm, faculty look both within and beyond the local education sector to understand the context for which education must prepare students. In many cases, the result of these efforts has been the embrace and/or creation of new practices that address widespread gaps in the profession: redesigning the timetable and faculty roles to better support learning goals; recognizing mental and socio-emotional health as school priorities; embracing service learning and student leadership in all grades; establishing project-based learning for deep, student-led inquiry; introducing electives in elementary grades for increased student voice, choice, and enrichment; design thinking and entrepreneurship as problem solving processes; and more. Supporting the school mission has been a growing network of external partners who share diverse expertise, lived experience, and offsite opportunities, infusing new perspectives and unforgettable interactions into daily learning. All of the above began many years ago in the KCS elementary school and played a significant role in the development of the secondary school.

Starting long before the 2021 launch of the KCS Senior School, professional learning at KCS included research focused on the future launch of a secondary division. With the same determination to establish system-level solutions that address gaps, challenges, and opportunities, staff worked with community members from all sectors to design a learning experience that extended the foundation of our Junior School so youth would thrive in high school, in their post-secondary studies, and throughout adulthood in whatever ways they choose (Future Design School, 2022; Lichtman, 2020[3,4]).

Research has long revealed concerning trends, particularly in secondary schooling, many of which correlate to deeply entrenched features in education that work against today's ever-changing reality. Unwilling to accept practices that are not in the best interests of students, new programs and processes were created to directly connect the Senior School experience with what post-secondary institutions, employers, and thought leaders say is

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[2] The following article, published in 2011 in the former Our Kids Dialogue magazine, explains curriculum mapping and its impact at KCS : How Curriculum Mapping Can Carry Your School into the 21st Century.
[3] Future Design School (2022). Finding Your Place and Blazing Your Path: Kingsway College School. https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vvfBWJUosd3vfnSrD1T55alPht6QeVSP/view?usp=sharing.
[4] Lichtman, G. (2020, February 3). Great Design Process Wins: Senior School of Kingsway College, Toronto. https://www.grantlichtman.com/great-design-process-wins-senior-school-kingsway-college-toronto/.

needed yet not commonplace. The following system analysis will identify driving disconnects in education and explain how the KCS Senior School is distinctly designed to support system optimization within the Ontario, Canada regulatory framework.

The Need for Better

Multiple factors reveal increasing strain in education in Ontario and far beyond, particularly in secondary schooling.

Mental and Socio-Emotional Health

A growing youth mental health problem was already evident before being exacerbated by the COVID pandemic.

- According to the Statistics Canada Report "Portrait of Youth in Canada[5]", youth reporting excellent or very good health has dropped since a 2003 high of 76% to 60% in 2019.
- The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health shares[6] that 39% of Ontario high school students report moderate-to-serious levels of psychological distress (anxiety and depression), and a further 17% indicate a serious level of distress.
- A cross-national research study led by the Public Health Agency of Canada[7] found that between 2014 and 2018, grade 10 girls reporting they feel a lot of pressure at school jumped from 26% to 39%. Close to half of grade 10 students don't feel their teachers care about them. As grades increase from elementary to high school, fewer students reported learning in a positive school climate. The decline for females on most mental health measures was worse than males.
    - A ten-year study by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention[8], monitoring trends from 2011 to 2021, found that 57% of high school girls report persistent sadness or hopelessness, up from 36% ten years earlier. Among boys, 29% said the same, up from 21% in 2011. The number of teens who seriously considered

[5] Statistics Canada (2021). Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/42-28-0001/2021001/article/00001-eng.htm.

[6] See the study by Boak et al. (2018) The mental health and well-being of Ontario students, 1991-2017: Detailed OSDUHS findings. CAMH Research Document Series no. 47. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. referenced in the website for the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the webpage for Mental Illness and Addiction: Facts and Statistics. https://www.camh.ca/en/Driving-Change/The-Crisis-is-Real/Mental-Health-Statistics.

[7] Public Health Agency of Canada (2020, June 24). https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/science-research-data/youth-findings-health-behaviour-school-aged-children-study.html#ch4.

[8] Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2021). Youth Risk Behaviour Survey, Data Summary and Trends Report, 2011-2021. https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBS_Data-Summary-Trends_Report2023_508.pdf.

suicide also rose substantially, reaching 30% of girls. While lower among boys, concerning signs rose for them as well.

- A 2023 Survey on COVID and Mental Health[9] by Statistics Canada reveals that, while there have been significant improvements in reported measures of mental health, sense of belonging, and life satisfaction since an alarming low in 2021, "symptoms of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder remain unchanged." A high prevalence of these symptoms were found among certain sub-groups, including young adults (pg. 5).

While certain levels of stress and pressure are healthy and related to growth, the statistics above identify unhealthy levels that not only work against learning but also introduce mental illness at a notably vulnerable time that can contribute to lifelong challenges[10].

There are multiple potential reasons for the negative developments in youth mental health. Many likely reasons are outside the scope of schools, such as the role of social media, the ubiquity of cell phones, and the more recent pandemic and lockdowns. Some reasons are within the scope of school. A 2019 Pew Research study[11] found that 61% of U.S. teens between 13 and 17 years old reported they feel a lot of pressure to earn high grades. A further 26% said they feel some pressure to do so. For comparison, the next highest category where respondents said they felt a lot of pressure was "looking good", chosen by 29%. More recently, an article published in the Journal of Pediatrics in September 2023, following a meta-analysis of global research, shared overwhelming evidence that the lack of independent time in childhood and youth - time free from the direct oversight of adults - is a strong factor in what they identify as a global mental health emergency among children and youth.[12] School, and its increasing imposition on the days, evenings, weekends, and preoccupations of youth, especially in competitive, even heralded programs, is a significant source of incessant adult oversight.

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[9] Statistics Canada (2023, December 12). Survey on COVID and Mental Health: February to May 2023. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/231212/dq231212c-eng.htm.

[10] Schlack R, Peerenboom N, Neuperdt L, Junker S, Beyer AK. The effects of mental health problems in childhood and adolescence in young adults: Results of the KiGGS cohort. J Health Monit. 2021 Dec 8;6(4):3-19. doi: 10.25646/8863. PMID: 35146318; PMCID: PMC8734087. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8734087/.

[11] Horowitz, J.M. & Graf, N (2019, February 20) Most U.S. Teens See Anxiety and Depression as Major Problems. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/02/20/most-u-s-teens-see-anxiety-and-depression-as-a-major-problem-among-their-peers/.

[12] Gray, P., Lancy, D. F., Bjorklund, DF., (2023, September) Decline in Independent Activity as a Cause in Decline of Children's Mental Well-Being: Summary of the Evidence, Journal of Pediatrics, Vol 260

Declining Student Engagement

Learning is reliant on engagement[13]. Studies[14,15,16] conducted over many years reveal that engagement among high school students in Canada and throughout OECD countries, even pre-pandemic, has been and remains an area of concern. Some studies share evidence that student engagement overall has declined over recent decades[17,18]. Others reveal an additional decline in engagement from elementary to secondary students[19]. Formal schooling was not originally designed to engage all students. To address that gap, research has revealed multiple factors that are positively correlated with increased engagement. Positive relationships between students and adults, a healthy sense of control (agency) felt by students, learning about the world and engaging with it in meaningful ways, and a school climate with high expectations and positive behaviour are among them.

A New World

The world is changing in increasingly consequential ways. The pandemic; climate change; rising migration; declining trust in institutions, expertise, and information; increasing geopolitical tension; industry disruption[20]; and the recent, rapid incursion of generative AI are just a sample of issues that touch everyone. An education that prepares students for success after graduation is one that equips them to grapple with ambiguity, find problems as well as solve them, navigate global complexity, and bring the creativity, resourcefulness, and initiative that adds value in an increasingly unpredictable world. Students still need knowledge. They still need well developed skills in reading, writing, and computation. They also need to manage information and be able to adapt, learn, unlearn, and overcome challenges like rarely before. These changes in the world have increasingly revealed misalignment[21] between how school works and the mission schools are ostensibly designed to achieve.

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[13] Finn, J.D. & Zimmer, K.S., Student Engagement: What Is It and Why Does It Matter? in Christenson, S.L., Reschly, A.L. & Wylie, C., (2016) The Handbook of Student Engagement. Springer

[14] Hodges, Tim. (2018, October 25). School Engagement is More Than Just Talk. Gallup. https://www.gallup.com/education/244022/school-engagement-talk.aspx.

[15] Dunleavy, J. & Milton, P. (2010) Student Engagement for Effective Teaching and Learning. https://www.edcan.ca/wp-content/uploads/EdCan-2008-v48-n5-Dunleavy.pdf. Canadian Education Association. Vol. 48(5), www.cea-ace.ca.

[16] Education GPS, *OECD*, 1/28/2024, 3:19:40 PM http://gpseducation.oecd.org

[17] Challenge Success (2021) Kids Under Pressure: A Look at Student Well-Being and Engagement During the Pandemic.

[18] OECD (2013), PISA 2012 Results: Ready to Learn: Students' Engagement, Drive and Self-Beliefs (Volume III), PISA, OECD Publishing. http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264201170-en

[19] Hodges, Tim. (2018, October 25). School Engagement is More Than Just Talk. Gallup. https://www.gallup.com/education/244022/school-engagement-talk.aspx.

[20] RBC (2018) Human's Wanted: How Canadian Youth Can Thrive in the Age of Disruption. https://www.rbc.com/dms/enterprise/futurelaunch/_assets-custom/pdf/RBC-Future-Skills-Report-FINAL-Singles.pdf

[21] Kim, H., Care, E., & Vista, A. (2019, January 30) Education Systems Need Alignment For Teaching and Learning 21st Century Skills, Brookings Institute. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/education-

Growing System Disconnect

Formal education in Ontario began over 150 years ago. While it has evolved in important ways, there are core features that remain rooted in history and are increasingly disconnected[22] from the present and future. One of the most impactful of these is the extent to which the learning experience remains adult-driven. The norm is that students are required to learn what, when, and how members of the Ministry, curriculum designers, approved resource providers, school board personnel, senior administrators, and faculty expect in order to earn the high-stakes reward of a good grade. These adults operate within regulations and norms that influence other core features such as timetables, school design, teaching, learning, assessment and more. In many high schools, commonly accepted enrichment doubles down with added layers of adult control and standardization in offerings such as Advanced Placement courses and the International Baccalaureate Program. In this adult-driven ecosystem, a toxic "achievement culture" has blossomed in certain segments of society. Many children not only face substantial pressure at school but also in clubs, teams, and external programs designed more for achievement[23] than pleasure and personal growth[24], contributing to the already alarming decline in student well-being.

Adults have critical roles in education. They bring professional expertise and dedication that lead to a clear, positive impact on students. It must also be said, however, that an education system with excessive control by adults leaves little room for youth to benefit from the learning and skill development that follow greater agency in their learning. Many features that underpin mainstream schooling limit student opportunities to learn more experientially, from a wider array of adult experts, and in the world outside of classrooms. A system that doesn't include student agency, interests, and talents, by design, is a system missing a powerful force for learning and creativity: intrinsic motivation[25]. In essence, most schools leave little room for students to exercise the traits that post-secondary institutions, employers, and thought leaders have identified as the traits they most need to be successful post-graduation. As such, this defining trait of school, with the related norms that come with it, is misaligned to the world as we know it today.

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[22] OECD (2020, November 25). What Students Learn Matters: Toward a 21st Century Curriculum. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/d86d4d9a-en/index.html?itemId=/content/publication/d86d4d9a-en

[23] Gopnik, A (2023, May 15) What We Lose When We Push Children to Achieve. New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/15/opinion/youth-achievement-happiness.html

[24] Wallace, J.B. (2023) Never Enough: When Achievement Culture Becomes Toxic - and What We Can Do About It, Penguin.

[25] Johnson, M (2021, January 5) The Power of Intrinsic Motivation. Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/mind-brain-and-value/202101/the-power-intrinsic-motivation

Progressive schools find ways to develop the traits students need to better prepare for the future they face. Most however, even the most progressive, are still weighed down by many of the original, conflicting system features and assumptions. Schools need a larger pool of informed practices and system-level solutions reflecting today's reality.

By their nature, some students still do well, enjoy school, and keep their health. Some get through, build resilience, and find their way as adults. A growing number struggle through a system not designed to help them realize their potential. Better is possible and increasingly needed. For 35 years, the KCS Junior School has made evident what can be achieved by pushing boundaries in elementary schooling. The KCS Senior School was developed to do the same in secondary schooling.

The KCS Senior School Response

The KCS Senior School operates according to the regulations of the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME). Each course is designed to meet and exceed Ministry curriculum expectations; assessment and evaluation practices meet requirements according to the OME's Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools, 2010; 110 hours of instructional time are dedicated to each full credit; and multiple other requirements are met and verified through Ministry inspection at least once every two years to maintain credit-granting status.

Pioneering schools demonstrate that students are capable of acquiring both foundational knowledge and skills as well as today's needed mind- and skill sets by offering a broader school experience with more experiential learning connected to the world outside of school. Inspired by these schools and mindful to adopt practices that would also benefit student mental and socio-emotional health[26], the KCS Senior School offers a school program that honours Ministry requirements and enriches learning for students, faculty, and the organization as a whole through an ecosystem of high-impact practices.

The years spent preparing to launch the Senior School allowed time for detailed analysis of secondary education in the public, private, and independent sectors, both locally and globally. In addition, KCS staff regularly learn through membership in two independent school communities: the Conference of Independent School Ontario (CIS Ontario) and the Canadian Accredited Independent Schools (CAIS). Much of what is recognizable across all sectors, including teacher-led instruction, homework, exams, clubs, teams and more, are

[26] Ontario Ministry of Education (n.d.). Socio-Emotional Learning Skills. Retrieved January 28, 2024 from https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/program-planning/cross-curricular-and-integrated-learning/social-emotional-learning-skills

evident at the KCS Senior School. Independent school colleagues will also recognize some of the distinct features described below, though schools vary on how they are delivered. After lengthy consideration, some common programs and practices were intentionally not adopted, including Advanced Placement Courses and the International Baccalaureate as means of enrichment, nor elections as a means of selecting student leaders. Multiple other distinct practices were added, including the following:

1. Curriculum Enrichment through Agency and Impact[27] - Teachers develop their curriculum to go beyond Ministry expectations by including development of student agency[28] and challenging students to apply what they're learning in ways of authentic value and impact in the community. Service learning and student engagement in entrepreneurship are two examples of how this is achieved. Related to this enriching framework, the curriculum and co-curricular programs are intentionally designed to help students grow in their insight, ingenuity, and integrity, traits identified at the Senior School as the KCS Leadership in Learning Skills.
2. Network-Building for Staff and Students[29] - Thanks to a large and growing community of external Learning Partners, students and staff engage with external partners who bring expertise and/or relevant lived experience as part of every course and in co-curricular programs[30]. To support this, the school has developed an online tool that allows for the easy capture of relevant information and creation of a Learning Partner Gallery. All staff participate in identifying individuals from the school community, personal networks, and relevant organizations. Senior administrators vet Learning Partners before adding them to the Gallery. The database is shared with all staff so they can easily find individuals with sought-after experience, skill, or perspective. When desired, staff reach out to ask Learning Partners for their help, whether to speak with one student, multiple students, a class, or the whole school, or to discuss possibilities such as field placements, offsite learning, or workshops. The database is also shared with students so they can do the work of finding individuals or organizations and then reaching out, if given faculty approval, to engage them for learning purposes.

[27] Service Learning enriches learning, develops critical mindsets, and supports mental, physical, and socio-emotional health. It has been a core feature of enrichment at KCS since 2006. Visit the National Youth Leadership Council to learn more.
[28] Student agency is a trait whereby students exercise voice and choice in their learning as well as in leadership initiatives.
[29] For more on the value of network building, see Fisher, J.F. (2023, December 21) Building Community to Expand Social Capital Insights, The Christensen Institute. https://www.christenseninstitute.org/blog/building-community-to-expand-social-capital-insights/
[30] At the KCS Senior School, co-curriculars are enrichment programs that are mandatory for all students and develop Ministry-identified traits and skills that may or may not relate to specific Ministry course expectations.

3. Place-based Learning[31] - KCS students regularly learn about the world by being in it. The Senior School is located in the west end of Toronto, Canada's largest city, among the world's most multicultural, and a centre of excellence in many sectors. The school is next to Lake Ontario and hundreds of acres of greenspace. While the classroom remains an important place for learning, a source of enrichment in every course comes from students seeing their subjects in action, meeting the adults engaged in it, and frequently engaging in turn to apply their learning in ways that have authentic value in the community. Innovative tools and processes were developed to facilitate offsite learning while ensuring appropriate risk management.
4. Facility Design - The KCS Senior School vision is reflected in its facility design. The facility has earned two awards, including a first place Metamorphosis Award for the Interior Design. In addition to being a warm, bright, and beautiful space, here are some of the special features of our facility that directly support, and in some ways help catalyze, optimal learning:
    a. A central Market Place, the heart of the school, where community members gather, eat together, play games, collaborate, meet with Mentors, lead ventures, work, create, learn, teach, and more.
    b. An open-concept kitchen in the Market Place where students run the café, take a grade 11 Food And Culture course, and cook/bake for events, fundraisers, or just because they want to do so for others. With activity in the kitchen area visible to the whole school, it serves as a regular and enticing example of hands-on learning and difference-making.
    c. Classrooms with wall-to-wall whiteboards so students regularly get out of their seats and problem-solve/brainstorm/collaborate with peers, then present and inspire further dialogue with the whole class. In a world increasingly experienced online, this feature provides much-needed off-screen, human-centered skill-building.
    d. A multi-screen media wall to regularly showcase student initiative, thereby reinforcing that students are expected and able to exercise agency and make a difference.
    e. Breakout spaces near every classroom to support student choice and agency in where they learn best, when appropriate.
    f. A Physical Education Lab designed to instruct students in use of state-of-the-art gym equipment. The coming phase of construction will also include a larger multi-purpose space with a large bouldering wall. External properties to support our P.E. and athletics offerings include a rowing club, sportsfield, acres of greenspace, kilometres of running and biking paths, and two athletics facilities which together support multiple sports.

[31] BYEN & PEER Associates. (2008). Getting out gets results: Environmental education research from Boston and beyond. Retrieved January 28, 2024 from http://www.tinyurl.com/BostonEEFactSheet

5. The KCS Path Program[32] - Each Wednesday morning all students have time, location, resources, and access to expertise, their Path Mentor, to pursue learning on the topic of their choosing. As part of Path, students build an e-portfolio where they collect artifacts of related learning each year from five different "lenses" over grades 9 to 11: academic, artistic, athletic, citizenship, and an offsite experience. Student topics can change and are not intended to be a career choice, though some students use the opportunity to explore options of interest. By the end of grade 11, most students will have completed their portfolio, a Creative Impact Project related to their topic, and an extended essay on their creative learning journey in Path. Students are guided by members of faculty. Cross-topic and cross-grade collaboration among students is encouraged.

   While students are not graded on their Path artifacts, they are invited to link course assignments to their Path topic, where applicable, allowing them to complete both an assignment and a Path artifact at the same time. The opportunity for students to contribute to their own course enrichment, identifying meaningful ways to connect subject expectations with a topic of personal relevance, encourages students to think more creatively and exercise even deeper insight than what a teacher alone can evoke in designing an assignment.
6. Student Leadership - All Senior School students engage in authentic leadership by following a design thinking process each week in the KCS By Design co-curricular program. By joining committees in academics; arts; athletics; citizenship; diversity, equity, and inclusion; and social and event planning (with more committees being added as the school grows), students play a lead role in building the school experience. This process includes open-ended brainstorming, research that includes seeking various perspectives, creative ideation, and the launch of a pilot or prototype with an expectation of iteration. Members of faculty facilitate the committees.
7. Advisory Program - Two times each week, a small group of students meet with a dedicated Faculty Advisor in a program designed to achieve the following:
   a. Establish core relationships that will carry students and their Advisor from grades 9 to 12.
   b. Provide time for students and their Faculty Advisor to focus on student well-being and growth as leaders in learning (through instruction, discussion, conferencing, collaborative problem-solving, etc.).
   c. Provide time for Faculty Advisors to guide and monitor student progress in the Path Program.
   d. Support students in monitoring course-related progress, working on their Path Project, and pursuing related initiatives. Advisory also allows time to

[32] For more detail on the KCS Path Program in practice: Forging Paths in Humber Bay Shores

help students make connections between their Path topic and their courses' overall expectations and assignments.

e. Provide guidance-related learning and activity, including course selection; post-secondary planning; documenting community service; etc.
f. Provide students and parents a steady contact and source of support who can help students navigate challenges related to their secondary school experience.

8. Relationship-Based Learning[33] - A number of programs intentionally help ensure Senior School students build a variety of healthy relationships as part of their school experience. In addition to the regular opportunities to meet with classmates, teachers, and Learning Partners in classes, clubs, and teams:
    a. The Advisory Program dedicates time twice a week to building community and connection, supporting personal growth, mental health, and responsible risk-taking.
    b. The KCS Path and KCS By Design Programs provide cross-grade collaboration and community-building opportunities each week.
    c. KCS has a school-wide student-led House System that offers regular cross-grade friendly cooperation and competition.
    d. Weekly Homework Help and/or a Wellbeing period provide a further opportunity for students to mix with other students and teachers, based on where they believe they would most benefit.
9. Entrepreneurship[34] - Every student engages to some degree in at least one complete venture during their high school experience. As an introduction, the four-year KCS By Design program contributes to development of the entrepreneurial mindset. In grade 10, students learn more directly about entrepreneurship and the features of a successful venture. Currently, students are challenged to launch a student-led café and make decisions related to the value proposition, customer segments, key activities, partners and more. Market research informs development of a menu and pricing model. Based on this venture planning, the café is run by students who sign up to do so as an extracurricular activity.

    Each grade 10 cohort will begin the process anew, with additional ventures such as a school store or social enterprise being added as the student population grows. Profits support the KCS Student Entrepreneurship Fund, a source of funding for student-led ventures, including seed funding for individual ventures.

[33] Training in Relationship-Based Education (RBE) began in the KCS Junior School in 2018. KCS has always prioritized building healthy community relationships to support student learning and school improvement. Learn more about RBE here:The Centre for Relationship-Based Education
[34] Lackéus, M (2015) Entrepreneurship in Education: What When, Why, and How, OECD. https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/BGP_Entrepreneurship-in-Education.pdf

10. Physical Education for Life - Research[35] and anecdotal observations at schools across North America show that physical activity for many declines from adolescence to adulthood. High school is often the last opportunity to help all students find a personally meaningful way to be active for the rest of their lives. The physical education and athletics offering at the Senior School intentionally develops physical literacy[36], includes regular activity for all, and includes not only traditional sports, like cross-country running and basketball, but also sports such as rowing, rock-climbing, curling, karate, yoga, triathlon training and more.
11. Standards-based assessment (SBA) and evaluation[37] - The KCS Senior School has adopted standards-based assessment and evaluation because it best supports student learning. SBA is widely aspired to in the profession, and even expected by the Ontario Ministry of Education[38], but sporadically adopted because it requires a paradigm shift that, like other entrenched features of schooling, resists change. While schooling was traditionally designed to sort students, it is now rightly expected to focus on student learning. SBA empowers students to monitor what they have mastered, reflect on feedback, and dedicate effort where more attention is needed. Further, it invites student agency into the assessment experience by allowing future opportunities to demonstrate growth.
12. Timetable - The KCS Senior School timetable has been designed so it serves student learning and system alignment. It is a hybrid timetable with both full-year and semestered courses: grade 9 and 10 math as well as grade 9 Physical Education are full year[39] and remaining courses are semestered. Course periods have a variety of lengths, from 75 to 150 minutes, to support appropriate frequency while also making it easy for classes to go off site without missing other courses.

    The whole school is involved in several pivotal programs, each with dedicated time weekly: 75 minutes for Path; 30 minutes for KCS By Design; and 60 minutes for Advisory groups (split into two 30-minute sessions). The timetable also has two flex periods each week that include homework help and/or a wellbeing session;

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[35] Aira T, Vasankari T, Heinonen OJ, Korpelainen R, Kotkajuuri J, Parkkari J, Savonen K, Uusitalo A, Valtonen M, Villberg J, Vähä-Ypyä H, Kokko SP. Physical activity from adolescence to young adulthood: patterns of change, and their associations with activity domains and sedentary time. Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act. 2021 Jun 30;18(1):85. doi: 10.1186/s12966-021-01130-x. PMID: 34193150; PMCID: PMC8246658.

[36] Physical Literacy. (n.d.) Physical Literacy Definition. Retrieved January 28, 2024 from https://physicalliteracy.ca/physical-literacy/

[37] O'Connor, K. (2017, January) A Case for Standards-Based Grading and Reporting. https://my.aasa.org/AASA/Resources/SAMag/2017/Jan17/OConnor.aspx

[38] Ministry of Education, Ontario (2010) Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools. https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growsuccess.pdf

[39] Starting in 2024-2025, grade 12 students will take a full year leadership course that integrates with Path and KCS By Design, challenging the oldest students to mentor grade 9-11 students in their leadership initiatives.

students are guided in Advisory to decide how they should best use those flex periods. A "late start" Wednesday, where period 1 begins at 9:30 a.m., allows all faculty to meet and collaborate while students benefit from a later start to their school day. All other days begin at 8:45 a.m. and end at 3:35 p.m.

13. Award alignment - End-of-year awards are a long-held tradition in secondary schooling. They recognize achievement, offer a tangible goal that some find motivating, and support post-secondary scholarship applications. They can also demotivate and discourage the creative, intrinsically-motivated learning that the KCS Senior School strives to nurture. Following lengthy review, many KCS Senior School awards were designed to be notably transparent, with mission-aligned requirements[40] that can be earned by any students who meet them. For example, with student leadership as a school priority, a leadership award can be earned by any Senior School student who has led or co-led 12 or more substantial initiatives or community projects over the course of their four years. Student-led clubs, such as the debate club initiated by a grade 9 student as part of his Path and KCS By Design projects on politics and civic literacy, are an example of qualifying student leadership.

Benefits Accrued through System Alignment

Each feature above strengthens student learning by its addition. Collectively, they further strengthen learning by addressing system disconnects, removing features that conflict with the school mission and values, and adding synergy from mutual reinforcement. The following benefits emerge from this aligned KCS Senior School model:

1. A broader array of learning for students - In addition to enhanced academic knowledge and skill development, students, by design, become more:
    a. Aware of the world in its authentic complexity, full of opportunities, challenges, and role models working to address them
    b. Aware of a broader collection of potential study and career paths
    c. Aware of the nonlinear life path that most adults follow after formal schooling, and the roles of passion, persistence, agility, and resilience in success
    d. Experienced in identifying and pursuing opportunities across disciplines

[40] The Duke of Edinburgh Award is widely respected for being available to any youth who commit to achieving its requirements. This served as a model for KCS Senior School awards.

e. Confident[41] in their interests and strengths
f. Confident and skilled in their ability to make a difference, think creatively, and lead their learning
g. Confident traveling in and accessing services in the GTA and beyond, a transferable skill supporting future travel
h. Confident reaching out to, meeting, and leading conversations with adults
i. Aware of and humble in their understanding of leadership and the challenge of exercising it thoughtfully
j. Observant
k. Resourceful
l. Independent

2. Broader professional learning for staff - Adult learning is enriched by supporting students in the above as well as the inherent dynamism that comes from authentic school-wide student leadership, design thinking, and regular engagement with external Learning Partners. As part of this model, all adults benefit from rich exposure to new perspectives, knowledge, skills, and initiatives. Regular engagement in professional learning, reflection, and thoughtful change are woven into the professional experience.
3. Organizational learning and improvement - Through KCS By Design, a design thinking process is woven into the regular school experience. Though the KCS Senior School is new and an early creative phase would be expected, the school is designed to remain creative, with significant agency for that creation in the hands of students and staff.
4. A healthier school experience - The KCS Senior School is designed to better support deeper learning with a focus on physical, emotional, intellectual, and mental health:
    a. The school includes a broader array of relationships[42] for all students through weekly Advisory periods, cross-grade co-curriculars, and regular engagement with external Learning Partners.
    b. Student agency and leadership[43] add challenge while also equipping students to address it. Agency and leadership that focus on addressing authentic community problems helps build purpose, belonging, and a sense

[41] Markway, B. (2018, September 20) Why Self-Confidence is More Important Than You Think. Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/shyness-is-nice/201809/why-self-confidence-is-more-important-you-think

[42] See research on the importance of relationships in healthy learning at the National Center for Safe Supportive Learning Environments (2024)

[43] OECD. (2019) OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030, Conceptual Learning Framework, Student Agency. https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/student-agency/Student_Agency_for_2030_concept_note.pdf

that one matters[44]. KCS provides experiences which align with what adults face in their careers and which positively correlates with mental health[45].

c. Inviting student interests, passion, and strengths[46] into the regular school day contributes positively to self-confidence, triggers hormones that link to positive affect, and supports better performance due to the intrinsic motivation infused in student learning.
d. With frequent physical engagement in learning[47,48], whether wading into Lake Ontario for water testing in science class, walking in downtown neighbourhoods to distribute student-prepared meals to those in need for civics class, or filling orders as part of a student-led café, students benefit from the evidence that physical engagement in learning improves memory and reduces anxiety and depression.
e. Mental health instruction and socio-emotional learning is delivered during Advisory periods. Practices supporting it are woven with regularity into the school experience through both teacher and student initiatives.
f. Enrichment rooted in student autonomy, mastery, and purpose[49] leverages healthy motivation, persistence, creativity, and responsible risk-taking.

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[44] Russo, F. (2022, October 6) Do You Matter to Others? The Answer Could Predict Your Mental Health. Scientific American. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/do-you-matter-to-others-the-answer-could-predict-your-mental-health1/

[45] There is a widespread notion that students should experience school stress and pressure, even at levels adults would not tolerate, because it prepares them for the work world. This is a misrepresentation. In general, adults have opportunity to choose their careers and response to the pressures of work, both of which are examples of agency. Adults have the benefit of a mature frontal cortex, allowing them to better manage demands. Finally, career stress is usually linked to doing meaningful work, which correlates positively with healthy motivation. See Pappas, S. (2021, October 1) What Keeps Employees Motivated. American Psychological Association, https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/10/feature-workers-motivation

[46] Ruiz-Alfonso, Z. & León, J. (2016, November) The Role of Passion in Education, A Systemic Review. Science Direct. https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1747938X16300343

[47] For a seminal read on the benefits of physical activity in learning and mental health, see Ratey, J.J, (2008) Spark: The Revolutionary New Science of Exercise and the Brain, Little, Brown and Company

[48] Committee on Physical Activity and Physical Education in the School Environment; Food and Nutrition Board; Institute of Medicine; Kohl HW III, Cook HD, editors. Educating the Student Body: Taking Physical Activity and Physical Education to School. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2013 Oct 30. 4, Physical Activity, Fitness, and Physical Education: Effects on Academic Performance. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK201501/

[49] Pink, D. (2011, April 5) Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us. Riverhead Books. https://www.danpink.com/books/drive/

g. Finally, by intentionally not including Advanced Placement (AP) courses[50] or seeking to become an International Baccalaureate (IB) school[51], the KCS Senior School avoids adding more adult-controlled curriculum and standardized evaluation. Both AP and IB programs include some compelling features[52]. These features, along with others revealed during our research, were merged so that enrichment would align with a healthier school experience.

5. Post-secondary Preparation - The KCS Senior School distinctly prepares students for post-secondary success. In addition to the many ways in which the Senior School is designed for more learning, which will directly support both post-secondary admissions and success once enrolled, the Senior School further supports the next stage in the following ways:
    a. Post-secondary students increasingly engage in experiential, impact-oriented learning (referred to as work-integrated learning[53] or WIL), either through their own initiative or as required by their institution. The KCS Senior School, through place-based learning, regular student engagement with external experts, KCS By Design, and the KCS Path Program notably prepares students to succeed in post-secondary WIL experiences.
    b. The KCS Path Program was intentionally designed to be student-led so they would have four years to notably grow as independent, agile, intrinsically motivated, persistent, and resourceful learners. The KCS Director of Guidance, who meets with University Admissions Officers across Canada, the United States, and Europe (to date), has found that Officers immediately recognize and enthusiastically support how the Path Program prepares students for post-secondary.

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[50] Despite their presence in many high schools, Advanced Placement Courses, and The College Board which designs and regulates them, have critics who raise multiple concerns: Grab Your Pitchforks: Drive Out the Absurd AP Program by Grant Lichtman; The Advanced Placement Racket: Advanced Placement Courses Harm Students and Enrich College Board Executives by Peter Gray; AP Classes are a Scam by John Tierney; Our Schools Will Get Rid of AP, Here's Why by eight Heads of Washington, D.C. area private schools.

[51] Doherty, M. (2023, March 28) Exploring the Differences: An In-Depth Look at Two Global Education Programs. K12 Digest. https://www.k12digest.com/exploring-the-differences-an-in-depth-look-at-two-global-education-programs/

[52] The College Board introduced AP Seminar and Research courses in 2014 in response to post-secondary demands for more cross-disciplinary, student-driven research and critical thinking. The IB Program includes a globally-focused curriculum, attention to critical thinking, a year-long personal project, and an extended essay on the Theory of Knowledge, all of which offer notable challenge. All of the above, other than the Theory of Knowledge, are intentionally developed in the KCS Senior School program.

[53] Future Design School (2021, November 2) The Future of Higher Education: Work Integrated Learning. https://futuredesignschool.myshopify.com/blogs/news/the-future-of-higher-education-work-integrated-learning?s=09

c. University campuses increasingly embrace entrepreneurship as part of multiple faculties[54]. Admissions Officers are enthusiastic to learn that KCS Senior School students all participate in an introduction to entrepreneurship.
d. University acceptance, particularly in the top US universities and the most competitive programs in Canadian universities, increasingly hinges on a personal essay[55,56]. The KCS Senior School Program is designed to provide all students with a highly differentiating personal experience that they can leverage for essays and other personalized admission requirements.
e. The KCS Senior School is designed to help students learn more about themselves, the world, the people who shape it, and the many paths they can consider to find the best fit for them. Research has long made evident that high school students, even those with excellent guidance support, are often ill-prepared for decisions about post-secondary next steps, including majors[57]. Offering this broader awareness over four years provides a richer foundation in which to choose next steps.

Measures of School Quality for Today's Students

Parents and students rightfully expect schools to do their best. Many factors must be taken into consideration when choosing between multiple options. Evidence affirms that measures of school quality should still include traditional indicators such as variety and kind of courses, ways in which they are enriched, co-curriculars, extra-curriculars[58], and other enrichment opportunities that are offered. Measures should also include parent and student feedback on satisfaction, engagement, 'feel', degree of support, and other evidence of commitment to student learning. The KCS Senior School is designed to optimize performance on these measures.

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[54] Avantage Ontario (n.d.) Entrepreneurship Growing on Canadian Campuses, Retrieved January 28, 2024 from https://avantageontario.ca/en/entrepreneurship-growing-on-canadian-campuses/
[55] Tancock, K. (2017, December 29) Beyond Grades: University Entrance Essays, Tests, and Portfolios, Macleans. https://macleans.ca/education/facing-extra-requirements/
[56] Whitford, E. (2023, October 7) Want to Get Into a Top College? Better Crush the Essay, Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/emmawhitford/2023/10/07/want-to-get-into-a-top-college-better-crush-the-essay/?sh=7fa2dfdb336b
[57] Freedman, L. (2013, June 28) The Developmental Disconnect in Choosing a Major: Why Institutions Should Prohibit Choice Until Second Year, The Mentor: An Academic Advising Journal. https://journals.psu.edu/mentor/article/view/61278/60911
[58] KCS defines co-curriculars as programs that are mandatory for students but not directly part of a specific course. Advisory, The KCS Path Program, and KCS By Design are co-curriculars. Extra-curriculars are clubs, teams, and other opportunities that are optional opportunities for students.

Grades earned and the relative robustness of high school grades when students begin post-secondary studies is a further measure of relevance. The KCS Senior School will have its first graduates entering post-secondary in 2025. The school's evidence-based pedagogy and focus on leadership in learning aligns with a smoother student transition[59], academically and otherwise, than what many students experience entering post-secondary learning.

Additional measures of school quality should highlight the extent to which schools develop the attributes needed for success in today's context. Many thought leaders have identified these attributes[60] and these have been at the forefront of KCS Senior School development. The OECD succinctly describes these in their OECD Learning Compass 2030. According to the OECD, quality schools ensure students develop not only the foundational knowledge and skills that have always mattered but also traits that prepare them "to navigate by themselves through unfamiliar contexts.[61]" Specifically, the Learning Compass 2030 asserts that critical attributes include:

a. student agency
b. partnership with peers, parents, teachers, and the greater community
c. strong core competencies of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values
d. strong transformative competencies including the ability to reconcile tensions and dilemmas, take responsibility, and create new value

With these as the goal, measures of school quality would directly represent student growth in agency, productive partnerships, evidence of core competencies, as well as the transformative competencies shared above.

Knowledge and skill are responsibly measured in grades. Teachers are professionals who dedicate due attention and expertise to this important part of their role. Agency, productive partnerships, attitudes, values, and transformative competencies can be measured by grades but imperfectly. There is extensive activity underway in the profession to create practical, valid tools[62] that can measure attributes such as these. The KCS Senior School will continue to monitor this activity and review promising new practices. In the meantime, there are well established precedents, described below, that are being

[59] Volstad C, Hughes J, Jakubec SL, Flessati S, Jackson L, Martin-Misener R. "You have to be okay with okay": experiences of flourishing among university students transitioning directly from high school. Int J Qual Stud Health Well-being. 2020 Dec;15(1):1834259. doi: 10.1080/17482631.2020.1834259. PMID: 33106113; PMCID: PMC7594843. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7594843/

[60] See Michael Fullan's New Pedagogies for Deep Learning; The Council of Ontario Directors of Education's 21st Century's Global Competencies; The Council of Ministers of Education Canada Global Competencies; among many others with strong alignment

[61] See OECD Learning Compass 2030.

[62] See Mastery Transcript Consortium and People for Education's webpage on the move away from letters and number grades in British Columbia.

leveraged at the KCS Senior School to monitor and showcase the distinct student growth and achievement taking place.

Measuring School Quality by What Students Do

Fields that require competencies have long expected portfolios as evidence of applicant preparedness; portfolios show what people do. Youth and adults pursuing new jobs must submit a curriculum vitae (CV); CVs include what people do. There is no more direct measure of student achievement and the school which supports it than sharing the evidence of what students do while at school. Our commitment to deliver optimal learning means KCS must also communicate the actual outcome of that learning.

The KCS Senior School supports students in collecting evidence of what they do with their agency, partnerships, plus core and transformational competencies. High school students with a record of leadership, who have written novels, created original art, launched clubs, taught classes, initiated a venture, organized events, authored a chapter for a professional book, created an in-use technical tool and more (all of which have happened or are currently happening at the KCS Senior School) are features of portfolios/CVs that directly convey not only student achievement but also the quality of the school program that strategically encourages them. Students have much more potential than mainstream schooling is designed to reveal. They deserve to discover and be recognized for the meaningful impact they're capable of, while students. Since this is a critical outcome of schooling, it is likewise critical that evidence of this receive due visibility.

KCS Senior School students maintain an e-portfolio that captures their Path-related leadership in learning. The Media Wall and other displays showcase their leadership in learning. Multiple external communication tools showcase their leadership in learning. And a significant end-of-year event, the annual Exhibit and Path Presentations of Learning, invites KCS families, friends, and Learning Partners to hear first-hand about student leadership in learning. By capturing these stories of impact, the KCS Senior School is showing what's possible in education and in the potential of youth.

Conclusion

The world is complex. Today's youth know it and expect school to help them face it. The way to prepare for such a future is to focus on developing each student's ability to shape the future for the better. KCS students, like many in North America, live in a society with unlimited opportunities for those prepared to embrace them. As such, the ultimate test of a school is what students do, and how well they do it, when they're in charge of their learning.

Developing leadership in learning is a gap in education we can no longer ignore. KCS is designed to address it through an enriched system of place-based learning, network-building, student agency, organizational learning, and unparalleled experiences in leadership. Everything in this White Paper is underway, growing in impact, and expected to evolve, by design. We look forward to more schools embracing the need for system alignment and the additional innovations that would follow. By sharing this system analysis, we hope it will provoke reflection and growth in the profession so more students, and society as a whole, benefit from what's possible.