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WHITE & BLUE MAGAZINE
THE STERLING HALL SCHOOL

Celebrating 35 years

- 04 35 Years of belonging
- 12 Celebrating character
- 24 Benefits of social-emotional learning
- 40 Building community

Contents

<u>04</u>	35 years of belonging	<u>25</u>	Breaking news at SHS
<u>12</u>	Celebrating character	<u>26</u>	Preparing SHS boys for the future
<u>14</u>	Interconnectedness, curiosity & environmental responsibility	<u>30</u>	Building community at Founder's Day Terry Fox Run
<u>16</u>	Land Acknowledgement	<u>32</u>	SHS Alumni reflections
<u>17</u>	Celebrating our 2020 & 2021 Grads	<u>34</u>	The heart of SHS is community
<u>18</u>	Congratulations to our 2022 Grads	<u>36</u>	PA fosters connections
<u>22</u>	SK writing program sparks imagination	<u>37</u>	In memoriam
<u>24</u>	Benefits of social-emotional learning	<u>38</u>	Hats off to our wonderful team



The *White & Blue* is published annually by the SHS Advancement Office, serving current families, Alumni, Alumni families and our school community.

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Celebrating

35 years

Sharing our pride in The Sterling Hall School story

Our SHS journey began with 17 students, a boy-focused approach to teaching, and faculty and staff who were carefully chosen to care for our boys and support our mission. A lot has changed since 1987, but the essence of SHS remains the same.

Over the years, our steadfast commitment to each boy and our core values of Learning, Community and Character have been what has set us apart for over 35 years.

We are excited to take you on a journey through our past, present and future in this anniversary *White & Blue* issue. Come celebrate our school, our boys, our community and all the significant moments that have made SHS a home for our boys and our families. We welcome all who have chosen to be a part of this extraordinary place to join us in celebrating this momentous occasion.



In the beginning... there were 17 students

Looking back at how far The Sterling Hall School has come, from those first few students and a dream to an expanded vision and a student population over 300 hundred, anyone would shake their head in amazement. SHS is 35 and it is time to celebrate!

One of the first to share his sentiments is retired Vice-Principal James Macdonald, who has been involved since 1987 when the doors first opened to The Sterling Hall School. "We started that first day with 17 students, three teachers including the principal, and one additional administrator, and then grew from there to where we are," says James. "It's quite something to see what it's become."

The results are clearly profound for James. "I feel grateful, I feel proud. I feel celebratory, I feel gratitude. I put my heart and soul into the school, but I got so much out of it." He adds that the best reward was hearing from families, and then alumni, about the impact that SHS had on the lives of graduates. "When do you get that kind of appreciation for the school? As an educator, I don't think there's a higher praise."

SHS has changed immensely since that first day: growing to a student population of 320, moving from The Donway West to Cartwright Avenue, purchasing the property from the Toronto District School Board and expanding and deepening programs from academics to clubs. It is an impressive feat and James says that he's proud the original vision remains intact.

"The greatest thing about SHS is that the fundamental principles of the school are totally aligned with where they are now, even though they were articulated in a different way. That community-based atmosphere was right there from the beginning: the focus on the whole boy, on character, on concern for the environment, on physical health. When I would visit other schools, I didn't hear that type of language, or see it in their literature. But I heard it from day one at Sterling Hall. The seeds were planted very early on."

Credit for that vision of course goes to Sterling Hall founder and first principal Darlene Ferris. The idea to start a boys' school came to her while she was a teacher at Toronto's Bishop Strachan School, which at the time was also educating JK to Grade 4 boys. Darlene saw an opportunity. "I was filling the gap because there wasn't a boys' school at that age level. And so I knew that it would be successful," she says.

"The greatest thing about SHS is that the fundamental principles of the school are totally aligned with where they are now. That community-based atmosphere was right there from the beginning."

James Macdonald, retired Vice-Principal

Darlene's first step was to create a steering committee made up of the "founding families" that she now credits as foundational to the school. "The founding families were crucial to the growth of Sterling Hall. They gave and gave and gave and gave," she says, adding that they not only supported the school philanthropically but did everything from painting lockers to supplying materials.





That community support continued through the early years of the school, and came from all sides. When SHS couldn't afford lockers, one of the parents built them. When SHS needed desks or readers? Darlene ensured they appeared. By simply putting the word out, other schools generously chipped in. From the start, SHS had a community ready and willing to help.

In designing a project as ambitious as a new school, Darlene organized the initial setup of SHS using a big spreadsheet with deadlines to track everything from the uniforms to prospectus to curriculum development. "It was a massive list because it started from zero," recalls Darlene. Today she shakes her head and smiles at the audacity of the undertaking: "Do you know how many people said, 'are you crazy? You're giving up your job? To create a school? You can't do it. There's too many details.' And there were. However, in true SHS spirit, I persevered and am so proud of where the school is today." Of course, achieving our 35th milestone anniversary is living proof that Darlene Ferris was right.

From founding to growth

If Darlene Ferris's vision had been to create a community, second Principal Ian Robinson saw his job as growing it. Arriving at Sterling Hall after spending many years in both faculty and admissions roles at Upper Canada College, Ian was already impressed with the Sterling Hall students he had encountered. Immediately he wanted to build on what was already established. "My whole goal here was to increase the school's credibility so that parents felt confident and could see a community in development," he recalls. He also opened school visitations to days beyond Open Houses. "I thought it was very important that parents had the possibility of coming to Sterling Hall



and for their sons to meet other kids and teachers when they were ready," he says. From the beginning, decisions were made with the intent to grow the sense of belonging that SHS is known for!

Principal Robinson also looked for ways to make it easier to get involved in the community. He had the boys line up for class in the halls, and welcomed parents into the school, both concrete steps towards community building that continue to this day. He identified smaller class sizes as another potential attraction, so he reduced most classes to 16 students. For his part, he tried to work more closely with the Board of Governors, something he saw

"It's a unique school in Toronto. There is no other independent school for boys from JK to Grade 8. That's so important because I believe that these formative elementary years are the most vital years of learning."

Ian Robinson, retired Principal

other schools shying away from. "I needed to know that they were in agreement. They needed to know that I thought it was a good idea. We worked closely together," he recalls.

Ian achieved his growth goal, expanding SHS from 150 students and 18 teachers in 1995 to 300 students and 43 teachers by the time he retired in 2012. He says he was as proud to leave SHS in the hands of incoming Principal Rick Parsons as he was to join it on his first day. "It's a unique school in Toronto. There is no other independent school for boys from JK to Grade 8. That's so important because I believe that these formative elementary years are the most vital years of learning."



Sterling Hall through the years

SHS opens its doors:

In 1987, thanks to the vision of our Founder Darlene Ferris, Sterling Hall is established.

A legacy is created: James Macdonald (Teacher & Vice-Principal from 1987-92) helps to build the future of SHS with dedicated faculty and staff.

A new principal takes the helm: Ian Robinson arrives to begin building on what Darlene Ferris started. (1995-2012)



1987

1992

2001



Darlene Ferris

SHS finds a new home:

Ready to expand, our school moves to 99 Cartwright Ave.



Sterling Hall families support multiple successful Building Campaigns to help SHS expand.

- **A Time to Grow** (2001-2003)
- **Discover the Future** (2005-2007)
- **JMS Redevelopment** (2011-2013)

From growth to expansion

With SHS well on its way to success, current Principal Rick Parsons has taken on the monumental task to deepen and formalize the school’s values through the introduction of various programs, as well as embracing his role as team leader. Educated himself at a private school (Upper Canada College), Rick Parsons came to SHS after eight years as vice-principal at University of Toronto Schools. Working with students in high school made him keen to have an impact on boys even earlier in their educational journey. “We know from research that boys will start to form concepts of masculinity by the age of 10. We have an opportunity in the younger grades to really build those formative concepts,” he says.

When Principal Parsons joined SHS in 2012, his first action was to organize a senior leadership retreat where the staff created the current mission statement “To inspire and empower each boy through his formative years.” Rick recalls the real team effort in coming up with the statement, where a final eureka moment to change from plural to “each boy” clinched the notion that a team builds things better. “This was a perfect example where I could not write the mission statement alone, I needed everyone’s input to create something that represented our community.”

Rick further confirmed that he had found his place as an educator and established his reputation for inspiring others at his first assembly, where he coined a Parson-ism that has become a guiding principle for our boys. “I told

Principal Rick Parsons arrives: The journey to establish SHS as the leading independent school for JK-Grade 8 in Toronto continues.

New Intermediate Wing: SHS embarks on the Building Leaders Campaign (2014-2017) to build our new Intermediate Wing.

SHS buys 99 Cartwright Avenue: After many years, our school is successful in purchasing our current property, 99 Cartwright Ave, for \$11M after a 25-year lease agreement with the TDSB. We solidify the future of SHS at our current location as we celebrate SHS’s 30th anniversary.



▶ 2012

▶ 2014

▶ 2017

▶ 2022 and beyond



Rick Parsons,
Ian Robinson &
James Macdonald

The future of Sterling Hall

SHS looks forward to launching our **Sterling Hall Strategy 2022+.** The strategic plan and the new vision for our school is being developed in collaboration with our Board of Governors and with many members of the SHS community.



the students that I see a lot of big boys at the school, who can tie their own shoes and look out for themselves. But I said, 'boys can look after themselves, bigger boys look after others. And my goal is for all of you to be bigger boys.'" Since then, he says he's had the pleasure of hearing boys come up to him and share their "bigger boy" moments. The notion really summarizes his approach for the school. "We're in this community together, we're considerate of other people, living harmoniously with other people and trying to contribute to the lives of those around us."

While SHS has seen many changes over Rick Parsons' tenure, including enhancements to the literacy and numeracy programs and an overhaul of our assessment practices, it is the character journey that he is most proud of. Again, Rick consulted with the entire community to

solidify the school's core values of Character, Community and Learning. These, of course, became the pillars that are today's guiding values for SHS—and you will find them embedded in all that we do, including in this magazine.

While character has always been foundational to SHS, formalizing our character programming meant giving students a vocabulary for it and layering in specific activities to practice it. From our morning community circles to our buddy programs to the self-reflection page that now prefaces all student report cards, our boys put their character learning to practice each and every day. Rick points to research that substantiates the idea that individuals act in ways consistent with their sense of self. "If we can help them conceptualize in certain ways, they will strive to activate in that way. So, the more frequently we see a boy complete his self-reflection on his report card that says, 'I'm the perseverance kid: I never give up on a tricky math problem,' that's actually building a self-concept for positive psychology that will have a self-fulfilling proposition," he says.

Principal Parsons maintains that the power of community also makes vulnerability possible. "I think the small school community fosters this community involvement in deep caring relationships where boys are known and loved." This positive school culture and explicit understanding of character expectations, "creates a sense of comfort and belonging in the children, and for the parents of the children, it allows for courage and risk taking and then resiliency".

"I told the students that I see a lot of big boys at the school, who can tie their own shoes and look out for themselves. But I said, 'boys can look after themselves, bigger boys look after others. And my goal is for all of you to be bigger boys.'"

Rick Parsons, Principal



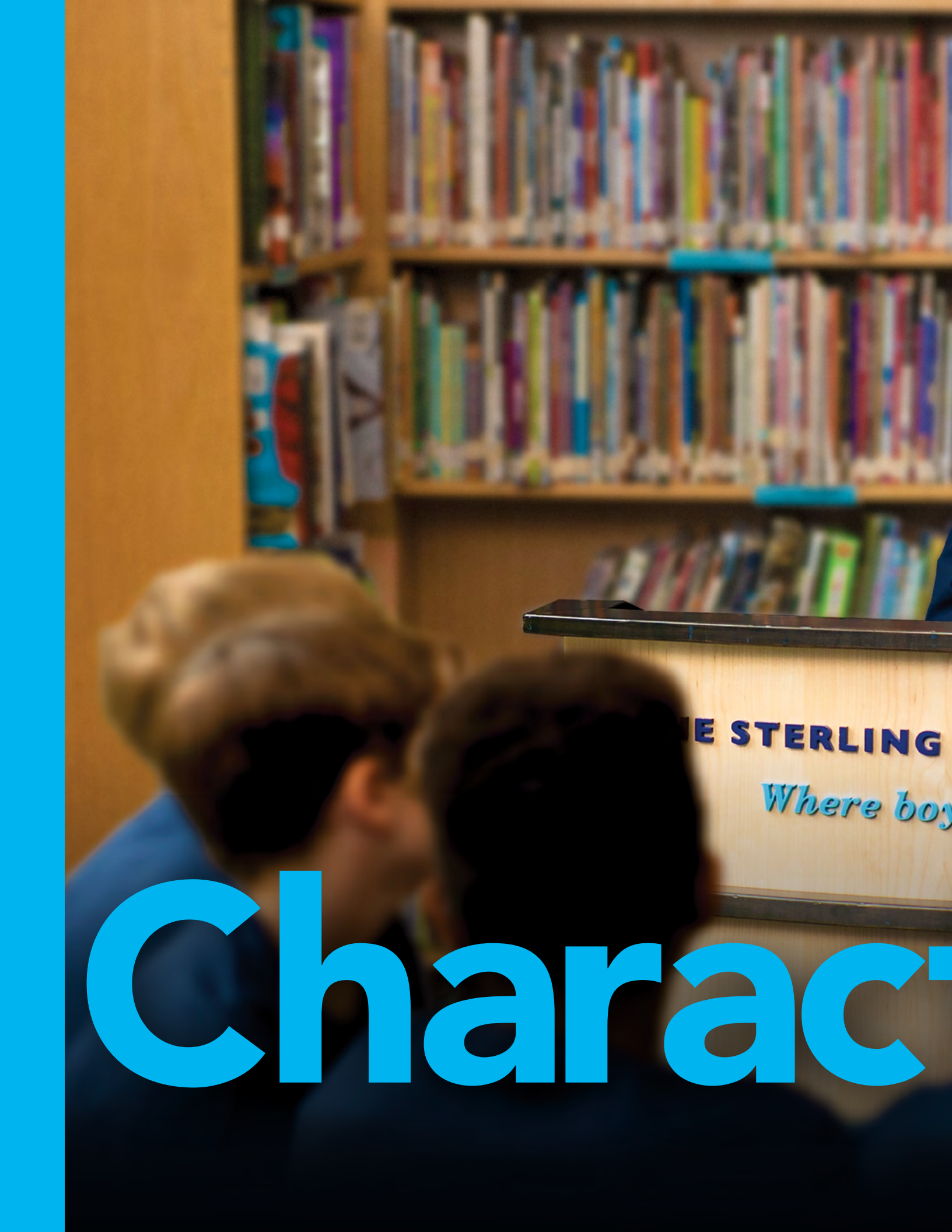


The future looks bright

As he reflects on how much has been accomplished at our school over these past 35 years, Rick cannot help but get excited about our plans for the future. There is still much that he wants to achieve, starting with a new Strategic Plan for SHS that will be launched in early 2023. With the help of our Board of Governors and our community, he is optimistic about planting the seeds for the next 35 years of growth. At the top of his list is creating purposefully-built facilities for each division that are reflective of the exceptional program and learning that is currently happening in these spaces.

Rick Parsons is grateful to steer the school into its future with all of these elements in place. "I think I've got the best job in the world. Education is the cardinal avenue for change, for growth, and for improvements. The opportunity to be able to bring a sense of self to the boys, to help them be able to create and sustain healthy relationships, find lifelong happiness and make a difference in the lives of other people? What can be more important than that?" At the 35-year mark, it's a sentiment that all of us at SHS can agree on.





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Celebrating Character at SHS

What does character look like? It looks like pink shirts, worn to give a voice in the fight against bullying. What does character sound like? It sounds like the chatter of Grade 8 boys busily filling and decorating holiday boxes to be distributed in partnership with the Shoebox project for women in need. What does character smell like? It smells like SHS hot chocolate for charity, brewed up and served by our boys for our much anticipated annual event.

The point is, when you've established character as a foundational basis for a school, you can find it everywhere. Teachers promote active discussion of character each morning through classroom community circles in our daily Health and Community program. Parents host workshops about character, and the idea is ingrained into everyday programming, including the Buddy Bench, Recess Rockstar, Sterling Stars (JK-Grade 2) and Athletic Awards (Grades 3-8).

At SHS, educators believe that character not only emerges naturally, but it is also something that you can work on, nourish and enshrine. That's why SHS created our character statement, which reads "We value and develop confidence and resilience, kindness and respect, with the courage to advocate for oneself and others." As Principal Rick Parsons points out, the statement captures three different kinds of

"The focus on character was there right from the very beginning. The original mission statement spoke of the education voice in mind, body and spirit, that idea of the whole person."

James Macdonald, retired Vice-Principal

character, including personal, moral and civic character. The last of these can be easily seen. "That civic character is just flourishing in the school, in a way that makes me so proud," he says.

Although formalizing our character program and intentionally scaffolding it through each grade is something SHS has done in the last decade, retired Vice-Principal James Macdonald adds that SHS's embrace of character has been long-standing. "The focus on character was there right from the very beginning. The original mission statement spoke of the education voice in mind, body and spirit, that idea of the whole person," he says.

Formalizing character at SHS meant seeking out inspiration and models. Today, SHS has embraced the Values in Action (VIA) character classification as a framework to help boys deepen their understanding of their own character. Teachers weave VIA character strengths into co-curriculars, classroom interactions, field trips, and assemblies. One very





visible space to celebrate character is in our SHS student report cards, where each boy is asked to reflect on how he put his character strengths into action. "At the front page of every report card, that voice of self-reflection is so useful in their character work, having the agency to self-assess, and then to set aspirational goals for themselves and who they wish to become," says Rick. These are followed by student-led parent-teacher meetings that give our boys agency while still involving the whole family in the boy's learning journey.

Yet another place where Rick sees character is in the Grades 6-8 advisory groups, where boys are encouraged to take the lead in helping each other out. "Someone may say 'I'm having a hard time breaking into the soccer game at recess' and another boy will say 'oh, can I take this one?' and help them out," he says. Rick adds that the Learning Buddy Program where older boys are paired with younger, is another example where both sides benefit and grow in character. This is an opportunity for our older SHS boys to take on responsibility as the leader in that relationship while building confidence and showing care for others.

SHS also shares our character focus with the world. When Principal Parsons was invited to serve on the board of the International Boys' Schools Coalition, it was in part because the board was impressed by our SHS character program.

According to Rick, the SHS character program is one of the most important steps the school has taken in the past ten years. "It's not a deficit model, but a strengths-based model of character. And that's really important, because



when we go through difficult times, we're going to lean on our natural proclivities. So, it's important to try to identify those character strengths," he says, adding that the process has huge benefits to self-awareness. "The research on this is quite amazing: it says that individuals act in ways that are consistent with their sense of self. By helping boys explore that sense of self early, by the time they are ready to navigate the complex world of adulthood, they will have a stronger sense of their internal toolkit and values.

One reason Rick takes pride in the growth of the Character program is its lifelong benefit. "Wherever they go to high school, our purposeful character work means boys are going to be leaders in their communities. They will have the capacity, self-knowledge and confidence to act on their beliefs. I think that we're building foundations for people who are civic leaders. We're bigger boys, bigger young men who care about other people and want to make a difference in the world. And I'm excited by all the success that they're going to bring out there."



Interconnectedness, curiosity & environmental responsibility

By Drew Gulyas, Director of Faculty Development and Innovation,
Experiential Learning Program Coordinator

Let me tell you the story of how Sterling Hall achieved platinum certification under EcoSchools Canada's program in 2021-2022. Like all things SHS, the achievement was rooted in visionary leadership, grew because of community effort, and flourished when the boys fed it with their energy and passion.

The roots

SHS has a long-held commitment to environmental initiatives. Three decades of teaching and learning at our school established fertile ground to tap into, and, in 2021-2022, we established three tenets to anchor our thinking as we strive to become an environmentally responsible community:

Interconnectedness - The systems that provide for life on Earth are complex, interwoven and co-dependent.

Curiosity - Awareness of interconnectedness enables people to question and reveal the impact of their actions as members of communities.

Environmental responsibility - As privileged members of the natural world, we will learn to act with reciprocity towards the planet to ensure the integrity of our environment for future generations.



Growing and flourishing

With roots to hold us, teachers and boys got to work cultivating a strong relationship with our home. Grade 6 students studying biodiversity germinated seeds, got their hands in the dirt, and rewilded the eastern boundary of the Paul David Drive parking lot with native plants that support pollinators. In Grade 3, boys harnessed the power of worms to manage food waste. They created and cared for vermicomposting colonies and processed their food waste into compost throughout the school year. Across the Junior Division, boys discovered the joy (and work!) of growing and eating their own food. In Autumn 2021, they planted 160 garlic bulbs and in Spring 2022, they harvested garlic scapes and produced homemade pesto!

Over the course of the school year, we dug deeper into this work – literally and figuratively! In the Ferris Gardens, primary students equipped with magnifying glasses, trowels and field guides explored and played in a wild space on campus. Having learned about food waste in their homeroom, the Grade 3 boys took their learning school wide and ran a multi-week food waste audit in the McCain Dining Hall. In Grade 4, the boys built bug hotels for the insects that will establish our pollinator garden and explored reciprocity by designing, teaching and playing their own eco-games.

These are a few examples of the innovative work that led to our achievement in the EcoSchools program. As cycles end and gardens mature, we have to ask: are we in it for the recognition? Good gardeners (and good teachers!) look toward the future. While we will continue to strive to be a national example of excellence in the EcoSchools



Like all things SHS, the achievement was rooted in visionary leadership, grew because of community effort, and flourished when the boys fed it with their energy and passion.

program, we will also be relentless in our pursuit of hopeful action. In 2022-2023, sandboxes will create space for primary students in the all-seasons mud kitchen as they deepen their love of outdoor play. Grade 8 science classes will explore, design and test sustainable ecosystems. As a school, we will participate in a nation-wide collaboration between independent schools that develops a climate action plan for our campus. Environmental learning and action is transforming our school. Keep an eye out for more sprouts!



Land Acknowledgement

We meet, learn, play and are nourished today on land within the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, as well as the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat and Haudenosaunee peoples. These lands are specifically referred to in the Toronto Purchase Treaty No. 13 of 1805 and in the Government of Canada 2010 settlement with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

As an educational community, we acknowledge the long-term effects of colonized education and the role settler education communities have played in erasing accurate Indigenous/settler histories.

In alliance with the Truth and Reconciliation Committee's 2015 Calls to Action, we at SHS name our intent and commitment as a school community to better understand and communicate accurate shared histories and Indigenous Knowledge.

We were proud of four SHS students (Spencer Wright and Harley Cohen, Class of 2022, and Harrison M. and James S., Class of 2023) as they carefully shared the SHS Land Acknowledgement with families and friends as part of our 2022 Closing Ceremonies and Graduation. The inaugural sharing of the land acknowledgement is the culmination of three years of learning and collaboration between members of the school community and organizations and people outside of our school who have been teaching us. It was important to SHS that the acknowledgement begin with the land and our relationship with it. We also wanted to include in the acknowledgement the nations who have lived here and live here, and our treaties with them. Finally, it was very important to us that we publicly name our intentions as an educational community to better understand and communicate accurate shared histories and Indigenous Knowledge. We are grateful to the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation for publishing helpful and instructive guidelines. Most importantly, we hold ourselves accountable to our statement of intention, looking forward to further learning through the years ahead.

This is an especially meaningful time at SHS, as we continue to come together as faculty and staff to learn more from Indigenous thought leaders. Our SHS stewards grow in number as they share and create learning and instructional resources that broaden the representation and understanding of Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous experiences. This is part of the greater Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) work, we as a learning community are committed to working on and sharing with our SHS families now and in the future.



Celebrating our 2020 & 2021 Grads!

Although we celebrated the Class of 2020 and 2021 when they graduated from SHS, as 2020 Head Boy Jack Jones shared, they “have been through something that no other class experienced – ending SHS and starting high school in a pandemic”. Both of these graduating classes missed out on the opportunity to gather in person due to pandemic restrictions, so it seemed fitting that we invite them back to campus for their own in-person celebrations! Invitations were sent out, a big tent with signs set up and a delicious meal laid out and each graduating class returned to share stories and reminisce about their time at SHS. Each event kicked off with a warm welcome from Principal Rick Parsons

followed by one last address by our Head Boys to their graduating classes. Teachers and staff enjoyed the chance to catch up with our Alumni again, and parents were eager to celebrate their sons’ accomplishments in person and with each other.

For two nights, we were captivated by how time moves forward yet somehow manages to stand still. In one moment, we were listening to stories of high school, new goals and achievements. In the next, we were watching the boys tossing a ball around in the field like no time had passed.

**Congratulations
to the Class of
2020 & the
Class of 2021.**



Top: Class of 2020
Left: Class of 2021



To both our graduate classes, we are so proud of how much you have grown these past few years and wish you well as you move forward in your journey.

Congratulations to our 2022 Grads!



Taking the transformative step towards high school and celebrating with all who have been part of their journey is an important rite of passage for our boys. It is also one of our proudest moments here at SHS, and this year it was extra special. Our boys were able to bid farewell to 2022 with the sense of normalcy they longed for, and we were able to provide them with a traditional graduation ceremony to commemorate their well-deserved achievements.

Mr. Parsons' address to the graduates touched on the familiar quote that "we live life forward but understand it backward". Such a simple phrase, but to our boys and to all of us, it carries profound meaning. It is a gentle reminder that through reflection on our past experiences, we can make meaning of our lives and prepare ourselves for the future. Going forward we can only hope that the life lessons imparted at Sterling Hall will help guide these exceptional young men towards the successes they will surely have in the years to come. We are so proud of our Class of 2022.

"You experienced growth and displayed unyielding perseverance, modelled courage and accomplished so much."

Rick Parsons, Principal



"Over the course of our years at this school, we have been shaped into confident leaders..."

Ozzie G., 2022 Valedictorian





Learning



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Senior Kindergarten writing program sparks imagination

By Aleeza Janmohamed and Kiloran Fensom,
Senior Kindergarten Teachers

Children are natural storytellers. We just have to listen and guide them to tap into their incredible imaginations. One of the most powerful ways to do so is through play. We know this is an important part of their early years and we want to give our students opportunities to explore, to make and to imagine. At SHS, in Junior and Senior Kindergarten, we strive to lay the foundation for literacy so that students see themselves as capable readers and writers as they acquire and build these necessary skills.

As teachers, our mission is to push our students' learning forward and so we are naturally committed to continuing our own learning journeys. One such opportunity was the Columbia University's Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, attended by a select group of SHS teachers. The project was founded in 1981 by Lucy Calkins, a leading literacy expert, and has since evolved various methods for teaching writing that have become integral to classrooms globally. Our SHS participants walked away with fresh ideas on how to push student writing to the next level, and took a first step by hosting a shared session with our colleagues in August. We knew that we would be able to engage our students, but the progress we saw from our youngest learners surpassed our expectations!

Oral storytelling proved to be an excellent starting point for our adventure. We started this during our community circles; sharing stories, learning how to craft a piece of writing together and investigating what kind of details make a good story. Throughout the year, we read rich and diverse fiction and non-fiction texts, and took inspiration from these authors and illustrators. We used our weekly sketching time to focus on how to draw and express emotions and we practiced the art of retelling stories too.

We scheduled daily Story Workshop time and students began by using "loose parts" to build their stories, show action, practise dialogue and share these stories with their peers. The use of open-ended materials provided students with the opportunity for more flexible thinking as they grew their stories. As students gained comfort with the process, they began to add words to their oral stories through post-it notes, labelling their photographs on our Seesaw interactive learning platform and using voice recordings. We left out blank mini books and soon each boy wanted to



*If you are a dreamer, come in,
If you are a dreamer, a wisher, a liar,
A hope-er, a pray-er, a magic bean buyer...
If you're a pretender, come sit by my fire
For we have some flax-golden tales to spin.
Come in! Come in!*

Shel Silverstein

write his own story. The stories started off as picture books, doodles, and squiggles, but they represented what that student had to share. Tales were documented and could be retold to a friend. They had a place on our bookshelf alongside our favourite authors. It wasn't long before these mini books became longer stories with students working on them throughout the week. Gradually, each boy was able to extend his capacity for focused writing time.

It was truly a joy to see every boy raise his hand for a turn in the author's chair or share his humorous illustrations or speech bubbles describing how he had used punctuation or sound effects. The students also learned to use a self-reflection "writer's checklist" and to edit their work with the help of both their teachers and peers.

We were so proud of the SK students this past year and can't wait to see what they will write in Grade 1. We are also excited to see how we can evolve this program further and invite our new JKs to enter the world of play and storytelling.

Oral storytelling proved to be an excellent starting point for our adventure. We started this during our community circles; sharing stories, learning how to craft a piece of writing together and investigating what kind of details make a good story.



Students used "mind maps" as inspiration for their storytelling

Benefits of social-emotional learning

By Catriona Gallienne,
Director of Student Success



A group of boys sit in a circle with their teacher. One boy takes a risk and shares something personal; something he's been struggling with. The other boys nod and offer words of empathy. Another boy shares that he's been going through something similar. He shares some strategies he's found that help. The first boy nods, the gratitude and relief apparent on his face. He is not alone. His community is here with him, helping him with both their strength and their vulnerability. There is no judgement here. These boys are respectful of the circle and those within it; it's a practice that's familiar, safe and dependable.

At Sterling Hall, we understand that we need to establish strong relationships before learning can happen. Healthy relationships are the key to developing our boys into successful young men. Our social-emotional learning program is integrated into all areas of school life, from classes like Health and Community to trips and extracurriculars. But what exactly is social-emotional learning (SEL)?

Social-emotional learning is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:

- develop healthy identities
- manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals
- feel and show empathy for others
- establish and maintain supportive relationships
- make responsible and caring decisions

(Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2020)

If you're thinking that these sound like important skills, you're absolutely right. SEL is vital for our boys' success, both as students and as adults who are capable of thriving in a world that is changing so quickly. SEL helps our boys to understand themselves and others so they can build those healthy relationships and learn how to work meaningfully as part of a team and their community. Social-emotional learning is a cornerstone of our program. Teachers build strong relationships with our boys first and then help them develop strong relationships with each other. Our teachers guide them to leverage their strengths and relationships during challenges.

Our SEL program is incorporated in all aspects of school life. Each day begins with Health and Community, setting our boys up for success by prioritizing connection from the very start. This time includes health classes, community circles and our Tier 1 SEL program, Second Step, an evidence-based, age-appropriate SEL curriculum. Boys from Kindergarten through Grade 8 learn what healthy relationships look like and how to foster them.

This social-emotional learning is further deepened by character education, which is integrated throughout our program. The 24 VIA character strengths, which include bravery, gratitude and leadership among many others, are common language in classrooms, assemblies,

Every boy learns to recognize and appreciate his own signature strengths and value the strengths of others. By cultivating this knowledge of self, boys are able to develop confidence and resilience and find the courage to advocate for themselves and others.

on the playground, during off-site excursions and in extracurriculars. Every boy learns to recognize and appreciate his own signature strengths and value the strengths of others. By cultivating this knowledge of self, boys are able to develop confidence and resilience and find the courage to advocate for themselves and others.

As boys learn new skills and take risks, occasional conflicts inevitably arise. The Second Step program explicitly teaches practical problem-solving steps for navigating conflicts and repairing damaged relationships by allowing boys to express themselves and brainstorm solutions. Teachers further support this by using collaborative problem-solving, which helps students express themselves and brainstorm a variety of solutions, thereby building capacity for solving future problems.

The final piece of our SEL program is you. As always, we are grateful for the partnership with our parents and the wider SHS community. Our students' success is buoyed by healthy home-school relationships. Ask an SHS boy what he is learning in Second Step or to tell you more about his character strengths. His ease with character language is sure to impress.

Breaking news at SHS

So much goes on at SHS that sometimes it's hard to know what upcoming events, noteworthy results and achievements are happening in our halls! Thankfully, some forward-thinking teachers have found unique ways to shine the spotlight on our boys and in the process, provided our community with a way to stay on top of all things SHS.

The SHS News Club, a new addition to the diverse and exciting SHS Clubs scene, was a hit with both boys and parents alike! Under the mentorship of Mr. Burns, our Grade 5 club members worked together each week to create five-minute news segments that were broadcast to our homeroom classrooms each Monday. The informative and often hilarious broadcast had our boys spoofing real news announcers to create playful episodes that made us laugh while giving us a window into life at SHS. Reminders, weekly announcements, weather forecasts and even a special report for those looking for a deeper dive into the news, gave everyone a reason to listen.

As for their style of journalism? These boys were irresistible! Mustaches, props and jokes added a bit of flair, or as we say at SHS, "zest", to the programming. This purposeful yet fun endeavour was a wonderful way for our boys to practice teamwork, engage in risk taking and develop their media production skills too. For us, however, it was a rare opportunity to watch the news and smile – what a wonderful way to start the day!



Preparing SHS boys for the future

By Kate Taylor,
Director of Curriculum

We all know the old saying, “Give a person a fish, and you feed them for a day; teach a person to fish, and you feed them for life.” This adage highlights the benefits of sound teaching, where students learn lifelong skills that they can transfer to many aspects of life.

As we look to the future amidst today’s unpredictable changes, we might even take the question further: will students still even need to fish? As our future knowledge landscape changes, our teachers need to be even more nimble in preparing SHS students for success in our ever-changing world. Thankfully, one constant is the continued dedication of our SHS educators, who have become even more adept and flexible in their teaching.

How do our teachers do it? Our faculty are relentless lifelong learners who continue to acquire knowledge by going back to school, participating in professional development, collaborating with others and adjusting to feedback. All this input has changed how we teach. Teachers also look out for the whole child as mentors, coaches, outdoor-ed leaders, creativity generators, and maybe, most importantly, as relational managers in our mission to help boys belong. When students feel they belong to something bigger than themselves, they become empowered to activate change and take risks.

As educators, we are familiar with multiple resources that teach us how to prepare our students for the future. Twenty-first-century skills¹ and global competencies², to name a few, are used and taught frequently. In particular, Sterling Hall teachers have embraced four major competencies as they look to prepare our students for the future: empathy, collaboration, self-directed learning and belonging.

American sociology researcher and professor Brené Brown reminds us that “empathy is a choice, and it’s a vulnerable one.” As our teachers work with boys to think critically

about the world around them and encourage actions to make it better – they teach the boys to lead with empathy. They work to broaden the references and examples used to teach our students, drawing from global cultural references. Our boys continually challenge themselves to deeply understand the situation or problem while considering the intended or unintended consequences alongside possible solutions.

We see this clearly in how the Grade 5s are taught to approach ways to learn more about Indigenous Nations. They start by first unlearning the histories of recent times and then learning through the voices of current Indigenous Peoples. They research maps from before colonization and look at the multitude of languages that were spoken prior to the arrival of the Europeans. Then they think about what has changed and what choices were made by Canada. Before embarking on possible actions such as raising funds for Orange Shirt Day, they think carefully about what message they are sending and who is benefitting. They begin to understand that being an ally



is a selfless act. Our students are asking questions about what is respectful and appropriate of another culture before taking action. These steps toward empathy will help SHS students become compassionate leaders in our future world.

As boys come together to solve these real-world problems, they must collaborate. Lev Vygotsky, the renowned educational thinker, believed strongly that community plays a central role in the process of “making meaning.” (Vygotsky, 1978³) Collaboration is a skill that constantly requires flexibility and social-emotional learning (SEL) skills. So, as our SHS students form teams and practice their SEL skills, they strengthen their ability to listen, ask good questions, and negotiate to achieve a common goal.

As students collaborate, they learn to drive their own learning. Through our focus on student-led projects, we give the boys agency to think critically about real-world problems as we help them to build the creative and critical thinking skills needed to solve future problems. During student-led project time this past year, our Grade 4 students brainstormed ideas about what a new addition to SHS could look like. They measured the Bentworth parking lot, interviewed teachers, gathered data, completed surveys and then built models to showcase their designs. This learning brought together multiple disciplines, was meaningful to their world and allowed the boys to take action.

Experts in the field of raising and teaching boys such as Michael Reichert (who conducted a workshop at SHS last year) have highlighted that we are in a critical time to be raising boys. He notes, “a young man’s self-confidence is not accidental or serendipitous but derives from experiences of being accurately understood, loved and supported.” We know that boys are relational learners, and our teachers practise this each day. Coming to a place and returning to one where you are uniquely you and welcomed is a special feeling. Without this sense of belonging, none of the other work can take place. Our teachers prepare our students by making sure they feel connected and cared for. They are expert relational managers. You can see this in action each day at SHS, whether through teachers in conversation with boys, in our morning community circles, or investing in activities that the boys are interested in, just to show they care.



“SHS fostered my most meaningful character growth. Enabling me to become a more positive and empathetic learner.”

Sam Wilder, 2018

As our students move through their years at Sterling Hall and then continue to return as alumni, they often note that the sense of community and belonging at our school is something they haven’t found anywhere else.

As we look at our young boys and think about how we want to prepare them as adults, we continue to work on these skills with them. Our hope is that they experience a seamless transition into a world full of challenges and opportunity and that they approach these moments with the hope and empathy they harnessed here at Sterling Hall. We always look forward to our Alumni returning and sharing what they are doing and talking about how The Sterling Hall School gave them the navigational tools they needed to be ready for life.

1. panoramaed.com/blog/comprehensive-guide-21st-century-skills
2. oecd.org/pisa/innovation/global-competence/
3. simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html



Communi



community

Founder's Day Terry Fox Run builds community

Terry Fox said that "anything is possible if you try" and at Sterling Hall, we agree. As a school, we strive through our teaching and our actions to demonstrate the character traits that Terry personified. We also look for opportunities to weave service learning into our curriculum so that our boys learn what it means to give back to their community.

Now in our 29th year, our participation in the Terry Fox Run to raise money in support of cancer research has become a much-loved tradition at SHS. Our Founder's Day Terry Fox Run started small, but as each year passed, our commitment to the cause grew. By 2011, Sterling Hall had become the very first elementary school in the world to raise over one million dollars for the Terry Fox Foundation – an incredible accomplishment for a growing school.

Since 1984, our current families and our Alumni families have rallied together to support our boys' fundraising efforts, to volunteer their time and of course to lace up their shoes. Our annual Founder's Day Terry Fox Run serves as a reminder of the character traits that we embrace at Sterling Hall, such as courage, perseverance and care for others. Our boys and our community live these values each day as we continue to support each other and work towards a better tomorrow.



Left: Terry Fox Run 1997

Top-right: Terry Fox Run BBQ 1997

Bottom-right: Terry Fox Run 2012





"We are so grateful to everyone at The Sterling Hall School for their unwavering support."

The Terry Fox Foundation



SHS Alumni reflections

Alumnus-turned-entrepreneur found confidence and support at SHS

Fraser Fitzgerald, Class of 2004

Ask Fraser Fitzgerald, Class of 2004, what he remembers best at SHS and he'll tell you it's the support and trust that he received from teachers. One of the first was his Grade 5 teacher Mrs. Pitcher, who he calls his favourite teacher to this day. "She really took me under her wing and was really kind. I'm dyslexic, and I just don't do well in a setting where I'm sitting there for an hour. She realized that and was really patient," he says. "She was like, 'I see you. You might learn a bit differently. But there's nothing wrong with that.'"

While Mrs. Pitcher showed kindness, Fitzgerald says he also appreciated how she pushed him to succeed. "I had to give a speech on LEGO. And I was really stressed about it, and then she actually forced me to go and do it in front of the whole school, which I really didn't want to do. But because she believed in me, I felt like I could," he says.

Fitzgerald also found support for his favourite hobby, playing the guitar, something that became a major passion all through high school. Joining SHS in Grade 5 with his twin brother Cameron and younger brother Eamon, he started playing electric guitar in Grade 7 and formed a band his brothers called Extra 13.

Fitzgerald recalls being elated to be trusted to play in the music room at recess. "Just the freedom when they said, 'you can just go in here to the rehearsal space' made me feel trusted and valued." Fitzgerald also participated in cross-country running, track and field, and grew his appreciation of art as well. He also has fond memories of SHS trips including a dog sledding outing in Grade 8 and trips to Boston, Quebec City and



Montreal. "All these things that I wouldn't have done if I wasn't at SHS," he says, opened up his world.

Today, Fitzgerald is the owner of a vegan food company called No Bones Kitchen, which offers cooking classes and sells specialty foods. He himself teaches some of the cooking classes, an endeavor he found inspiration for at SHS. Fitzgerald names teamwork and confidence as skills he learned at SHS that he uses today in his business and as a teacher.

"Because I'm very sensitive myself, I don't treat everyone in the room at the same level. I definitely think back to my memories of SHS teachers showing me a lot of respect and taking their time with me," he says.

The heart of SHS is community

Our SHS community is both cherished and thriving. With each event where our SHS parents volunteer their time, each hour the members of our Board of Governors work to strengthen our school strategically and financially, and each initiative that our Parents Association executes to support our boys and school, our community becomes stronger and more connected. The relationship between SHS and our families, both current and alumni, is what has empowered us to continually grow and evolve over these 35 years. It has unlocked creativity and innovation, but most of all, it has created a place where our boys are cared for, challenged and inspired.

Thank you to all those who have contributed to our school in such a multitude of meaningful ways. As we look back on 35 years of community, we can see that together we have built a school we are proud of. The possibilities of what we can do together and of what the next 35 years and beyond holds are truly limitless.



Over 70% of our parent community volunteers at SHS

The PA raised \$34,500, which was used to refurbish the climber, purchase Chromebooks and equipment for the fitness centre and Outdoor Ed program





In-person **Friday Assemblies** return



Parents enjoyed connecting through online events like Family Trivia Night, Book Club, Paint Night and in-person PA meetings



PA volunteers organized pizza lunches and a BBQ for SHS Olympics & Terry Fox Run



The PA generously dropped off gifts for our SHS neighbours



Faculty and staff are appreciated by both the PA and Board of Governors



SHS parents host coffee socials and parent cocktail parties to build community

Parents Association fosters connections



Parents Association President Barbara Owen and Vice-President Rya Kirkwood Prozes (2021-2022), along with the entire PA team, worked diligently and passionately this past year to bring to life the time-honoured SHS events that embody our spirit of community. They rose to the challenge of reintroducing live, in-person events so that our families could connect and engage face-to-face. From practical initiatives like our Used Uniform Sale, to boy-centred activities like Olympic Pizza Lunch and Family Trivia Night, to hosting socials, book clubs, parent educational seminars and wonderful faculty and staff appreciation events, our PA tirelessly dedicated themselves to fostering connections and building our vibrant SHS community.

For the 2022-23 school year, we bid a fond farewell to Barbara Owen and a warm welcome back to Rya Kirkwood Prozes who will be taking on the role of PA President. Joined by her new Vice-President, Michelle Goldman, we anticipate an exciting year of community events, fundraising initiatives and social opportunities under their valued leadership.



Remembering Ernesto Pereira

Ernesto Pereira was an important figure in our school for many years – he was part of our SHS community and upon his retirement in 2009, his presence was greatly missed. As our dedicated custodian, he was tasked with taking care of our school and of us, and he did it with kindness and dependability. It is with sadness that we share with our community that Ernesto passed away on August 13, 2022 after a prolonged illness.

Ernesto worked at SHS through the 1990s and early 2000s, and was often the first person to help during times of need and the last one to leave. He was loved by all – students, parents, staff and faculty – and had the capacity to bring a smile to everyone's face. In a memorial message, former principal Ian Robinson noted that "Ernesto was a genuine friend to all of any age". SHS extends our deepest sympathy to his family. He will be deeply missed by all who had the pleasure of knowing him.



In memoriam

Celebrating the legacy of Elizabeth Gray

In our close SHS community, the loss of our longstanding faculty member, Elizabeth Gray, has had a profound impact. After a private battle with cancer, Elizabeth died in August with her family by her side. She was a beloved friend and colleague to all who were fortunate enough to have known her.

Elizabeth celebrated her 25th year at SHS in June and her leadership and impact on the SHS community has been marked by dedication, love, care, passion and joy. Like the breadth and depth of her inspiring impact on so many boys, families, and peers, the loss we feel in our community is immeasurable. Elizabeth has been a connector of people at SHS for decades and she always set the highest bar for both professionalism, personal care and kindness in her relationships with others.

While Elizabeth's skill and knowledge were exceptional, she is loved and remembered for the wisdom and empathy she exhibited when helping our Grade 8 boys and families navigate their final graduating year at SHS. It was easy

to see that, as a Homeroom teacher, Elizabeth loved nothing more than guiding our boys as they grew and matured over their years at SHS. Two of those boys were her own sons, Stephen (2006) and Michael (2003) whose wedding she proudly celebrated this summer. Along with her husband Rob, they were a source of great pride and joy for Elizabeth and her love for them was evident in the personal stories she shared with colleagues and friends.

As the Director of Graduate Placement and Alumni Relations, a critical role held for over a decade, Elizabeth reassured boys and families with utmost sensitivity and care. She dedicated herself to ensuring that each SHS graduate navigated his learning journey effectively. And she did all this with unparalleled commitment and focus. But her relationship to these boys and families did not end there – she remained a supportive connection to our boys and families as they began and continued their journey as SHS Alumni. Elizabeth not only built a robust Alumni program, she was a mentor and inspirational figure for so many, and as these relationships continue to flourish, so too will her ongoing legacy at Sterling Hall.

Elizabeth always put the boys first – and her kindness and respect was apparent to all. She always found time for a boy or a colleague in need, providing advice and words of encouragement that motivated and buoyed others. When we look at our Sterling Character statement, Elizabeth was truly a shining example of someone who modelled the qualities we wish to foster in our boys and in ourselves. Her legacy is – at least in part – the example she set and the desire she inspires in each of us to meet and replicate it.

A Celebration of Life was held for Elizabeth at SHS on October 6, 2022. We are deeply grateful to our community for the outpouring of support and for lifting us during this challenging time by sharing their wonderful memories, stories and reflections.

Elizabeth's extraordinary legacy will live on at SHS and thanks to the incredible generosity of the Gray family and our community, future generations of boys will benefit from donations made to support student financial assistance in memory of Mrs. Gray. She will be deeply missed by her colleagues, the entire SHS community, and the innumerable lives she has touched.

Hats off to our wonderful team

Behind every SHS boy, you'll see an exceptional team cheering him on. For the past 35 years, our dedicated faculty and staff has been a very important part of that team, proudly educating, guiding and inspiring our boys as they grow.

Many things have changed since our small but mighty school opened its doors, but the essence of what makes us so special has not. Our teachers and staff are committed to supporting each boy by modelling and helping to build positive character strengths. Our faculty continue to innovate, looking for ways to engage and empower our boys by approaching the learning journey with dedication and care. Each success is celebrated and failures are learning tools to inspire and motivate.

This past year, our faculty and staff brought back in-person events to the delight of our boys and our community. It was no small task – but one of our greatest joys. Watching our SHS family gather and connect as it has in the past was a wonderful way to look forward to and celebrate 35 years of belonging.

Many thanks to our faculty and staff past and present for always making SHS a wonderful place and for helping to build the strong foundation from which we continue to grow.



Teachers support boys through formal and informal mentoring

Faculty and staff are committed to our Green Initiatives



Coaches and club leaders help to build character and confidence



Faculty and staff dedicate themselves to teaching service learning



Faculty and staff work to make boys shine at our Friday Assemblies



Faculty and staff make events like Thunderdome and Crawford Mile memorable



Specialist teachers bring expertise to the classroom

The Sterling Hall School
99 Cartwright Ave
North York, ON M6A 1V4

You're invited!
Come celebrate with us.

35 years

SAVE THE DATE | MAY 11, 2023

Cocktail Party – York Mills Gallery

An invitation with additional information will be shared with our community shortly.