

## **World Sickle Cell Awareness Day June 19, 2014**

The Toronto Catholic District School Board, at a meeting in April, proclaimed June 19<sup>th</sup> as Sickle Cell Awareness Day, in recognition of the United Nations declaration that this date be set aside to raise awareness about this global health concern.

Sickle Cell Disease (SCD) is the collective name for a series of serious, inherited chronic blood disorders that can affect all systems of the body. It is one of the most common genetic conditions in the World, with more than 25 million affected individuals and 250,000 children born annually. The two main consequences of SCD are:

- Severe anemia resulting in tiredness, reduced exercise tolerance, and delayed growth. The affected individual may appear pale and have yellow-tinged eyes from time to time.
- Vaso-occlusive episodes are blockages of the blood vessels anywhere in the body by deformed red blood cells. This causes a lack of oxygen in the affected area of the body.

The lifespan of persons with these disorders can be reduced by as much as 30 years and it has a devastating impact on the quality of life, most pertinent to education being the risk of stroke and subtle neurological deficits.

In order to raise awareness regarding Sickle Cell Disease, schools should have received some resources including a booklet entitled “Sickle Cell Disease: A Practical Guide for Teachers” and a video produced by the Sickle Cell Disease Association of Canada. Schools are encouraged to share the available resources and information with the parent community through your monthly newsletter, and during events such as annual curriculum nights and open houses. Everyone is also invited to review the available resources through the board’s website at [www.tcdsb.org](http://www.tcdsb.org).

As a Catholic community dedicated to student achievement and well-being, the Board is currently working on an overarching policy related to medical conditions, including Sickle Cell Disease, and further supportive strategies will be developed.

Our focus is to ensure that our staff, parents and students gain a better insight into the characteristics and potential complications caused by the disease, and to provide them with information on how to best respond to the wide range of medical issues that can arise as a result, and to support those who are who are living with this disease in a caring and compassionate manner, consistent with Catholic values.

**Angela Gauthier**  
**Director of Education**

**Jo-Ann Davis**  
**Chair of the Board**

*“A society is truly open to life when it recognizes that life is precious even in the elderly population, in the disabled, and even in those who are gravely ill or in the process of dying. When society affirms that the call to the realization of one’s humanity does not exclude suffering, and instead teaches how to see sick and suffering persons as gifts for the entire community, whose presence calls everyone to solidarity and responsibility, only then may this society call itself open to life.”—Pope Francis’s Message to the General Assembly of the Pontifical Academy for Life--February 19, 2014*