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# NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Aboriginal Identity: How do I fit in?

**TORONTO** - The Toronto Catholic District School Board is piloting a program to help students of First Nation, Métis or Inuit background feel safe in self-identifying with their Aboriginal heritage while developing an awareness of their culture among all students.

The program fosters positive role-models and helps to dispel stereotypes and had its genesis with TCDSB staffer, Frank Pio, who coordinates First Nation, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) curriculum and Dene Professor Dr. Suzanne L. Stewart from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. “This is a one-of-a-kind program developed in partnership with the Indigenous Education Network at OISE,” says Mr. Pio. “I saw a need for curriculum that helps our FNMI students recognize themselves in our curriculum. It helps encourage a sense of belonging which promotes success.” The program fosters continuous and positive role modelling for Aboriginal youth within education. Dr. Stewart states that, “Education is now a place of knowledge and healing for Aboriginal students and that begins with making it safe for Aboriginal students to self-identify.”

OISE Aboriginal graduate and undergraduate students work as peer mentors with the students. The OISE students, working with a First Nation Elder, provide resources on Aboriginal identity, culture, and education, to teachers and students. OISE students tell of their own story of school success that led them to a university education. The goal of the project is to inspire and model to the children and youth what contemporary Indigenous identity can be in an urban area such as Toronto.

“This kind of innovation in our approach to teaching and curriculum design helps students recognize themselves and identify with the curriculum,” says Director of Education Angela Gauthier. “We are appreciative of the support from OISE.”

By the end of May, students in Grades 5 and 11 from 25 TCDSB schools will have gone through the program, which was funded through the Ministry of Education’s Aboriginal Education Department.

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*The Toronto Catholic District School Board educates more than 92,000 students from diverse cultures and language backgrounds in 201 Catholic elementary and secondary schools, serving close to half-a-million Catholic school supporters across the City of Toronto. As the world’s largest publicly funded Catholic school system, we educate students in an inclusive learning community rooted in the love of Christ, where they are challenged to grow in grace and knowledge and to lead lives of faith, hope and charity. At Toronto Catholic we transform the world through witness, faith, innovation and action.*