

# Erin District High School

## UPPER GRAND DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Student population: 578; Grades: 9–12; Principal: Julie Prendergast

Erin District High School was built through innovative community planning between the Upper Grand District School Board and the town of Erin. The school building houses a library, a community centre, a theatre, a senior centre, a daycare and healthcare offices. Erin District has academic, applied, essential and French Immersion courses.

Staff use a wealth of data to set the specific targets of their school improvement plan: detailed results from EQAO, credit accumulation, attendance and Ministry school-indicator data, and information from report cards, departmental assessments, post-secondary applications and interviews with students. Staff are pilot testing the Ontario Comprehension Assessment by Pearson, diagnosing needs and formulating specific strategies in a cross-curricular approach to improve comprehension. Their focus is on narrowing the gender gap in achievement and meeting the needs of all students through differentiated instruction and effective assessment.



Beth Patterson, Laura Beal, Steve Ratz (vice-principal), Julie Prendergast (principal), Joe Burns, Gary Robinson

Teachers at Erin District take the cross-curricular approach to teaching literacy very seriously. They employ strategies used in elementary schools and are attempting to standardize language across the grades. Everyone (including science, technology and physical education teachers) uses literacy strategies in the classroom. They have a format to align writing tasks, such as essays, critiques or reports, in all subjects and they make extensive use of *Think Literacy*. Staff read Marzano, Hume and Sax for explicit ways to improve gender differentiation in education. They are designing assessments to suit gender preferences.

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**Julie Prendergast, principal**

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Principal Julie Prendergast says: “Specifically looking at gender data including EQAO gender data, we really want to target our assessment strategies and our instructional pieces. We have been looking at things to do to ensure that our boys will achieve at high levels. We are hoping that through the use of these studies and differentiated instructional strategies, we will see our boys improve in their overall achievement.”

Erin District has a five-period day. Students go to regular programs for four hour-long periods. The fifth period begins with 15 minutes of sustained silent reading in the Stop, Drop and Read program. The rest of Period 5 allows students the opportunity to seek extra support where needed. Students writing the OSSLT complete two weeks of preparation during Period 5 using material pulled from the EQAO Web site and *Don't Panic* (Wintertickle Press). At-risk students attend the board-initiated Smart Start program to develop literacy skills assessed on the OSSLT further; others can access Resource Room support. Period 5 is also an opportunity for events, visits and assemblies that would otherwise take away from the instructional day.

Erin District's transition team works proactively to engage all students immediately. Team members have extensive communication with Grade 8 students, parents and teachers, and use resource personnel to identify students requiring early intervention. Link Crew students act as mentors for orientation. Entering students are invited to a four-day off-site camp, where character and community development are encouraged through activities and workshops that stress respect and responsibility.

Student Success teacher Gary Robinson says: “The Link Crew and ‘Raiders’ Camp build a sense of community. By the end,



Erin District High School

**OSSLT  
STUDENT POPULATION**  
(eligible to write the test for the 1st time)

<b>49%</b>	Male
<b>51%</b>	Female
<b>29%</b>	Applied
<b>65%</b>	Academic
<b>3%</b>	Locally developed
<b>2%</b>	Other
<b>13%</b>	Special education needs
<b>0%</b>	English language learners
<b>0%</b>	Speak primarily a language other than English at home*

\* Based on responses to Student Questionnaire

students have a comfortable relationship with at least one older student or staff member. In the [October Grade 9] survey, students talk about their strong connection to their school. That connection is important to maximize student learning.”

The Student Intervention Team meets weekly to discuss students at risk and develop individual action plans. Principal Prendergast points to the resource room and its teacher as a major reason that her applied and essential students do well with work completion and credit accumulation. The room is open to all students, not just the 104 students who have Individual Education Plans.

The school’s mission statement is “Erin District High School actively promotes the pursuit of academic and personal improvement. We believe in respect and responsibility for both the community and oneself.”

This mission statement reflects the culture of the school, and Erin District’s unique setting aids continuous communication between the school and the community. Students interview seniors at the centre and record their histories. Co-op activities are easily arranged. Parents are supportive, and the

school council is very active. The council runs a “coffee house” for incoming Grade 9 parents. Along with feeder schools, the council organized a Parent Involvement Project featuring artist Robert Bateman. Since 91% of the children are bused to this small rural school, the parents are essential as drivers and volunteers for extracurricular activities.

Principal Prendergast says: “Because our students are involved, our parents are involved. They drive, they help coach and they mentor. Our school is a community building. When parents come to get their teeth cleaned, we are here, so communication is ongoing.”

A variety of extracurricular activities are available for Erin District students. These are facilitated by a common lunch and the extraordinary efforts of the staff. Data are collected on student engagement in an attempt to meet every student’s needs. Teachers gauge their success in this area by the fact that very few students leave Erin District without graduating.

Erin District staff use data to improve school practices. Information is presented with sensitivity and care, to

neither intimidate nor overwhelm. By sparking questions, conversations and reflections, the data aid the teachers in seeing trends, measuring results and targeting specific areas of learning for improvement.

**“The Link Crew and ‘Raiders’ Camp build a sense of community. By the end, students have a comfortable relationship with at least one older student or staff member.”**

**Gary Robinson, Student Success teacher**