



REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN ASD-W

2022-2023

Abstract

In 2022, Superintendent David McTimoney created the Anglophone West School District's Council of Student Leaders to conduct research about students, for students, and by students. They selected the topic of 'diversity and inclusion.' Their findings and recommendations are highlighted in this report.

The Anglophone West Council of Student Leaders
June 12, 2023

The Council of Student Leaders is a student-led initiative to improve a specific topic throughout the Anglophone West School District. In-person meetings were held every other month, and virtual check-ins were held in the months between those meetings. The group met with Superintendent David McTimoney multiple times during their work. This group represents urban and rural schools, K-12, 6-12, and 9-12 schools, and includes First Nations, LGBTQI2S+, International students, Newcomers, and English Additional Language Learners. At the first meeting, the group selected a Deep Dive Topic (the topic their work would be based upon). Initially, the chosen topic was "Diversity and Inclusion", over time, available data from student surveys, as well as the evidence that emerged from the Council's own research indicated that a student's sense of belonging would be an important aspect of Diversity and Inclusion.

Purpose of the Work

The Council of Student Leaders were given the opportunity to share their own experiences and opinions, as well as conduct research on behalf of their fellow students in the hope of making an impact on the way a student can connect to their school's environment as well as the need for inclusiveness within extracurriculars and within the classroom. The Council is taking initiative to make a more diverse and inclusive environment in schools to better each students' sense of belonging.

It is important that the Superintendent and other adults with influence in Education are available to listen to students. It is important to find ways for student voices to be heard and the Council's research revealed how students feel on an everyday basis. The Council wants to ensure that people with administrative power will create a more diverse school environment in which all students feel included within their school community.

The Council is hoping that the recommendations in this report has an impact on students who feel they don't belong by making them feel more included and by finding resources that help all students feel a sense of meaning in their place of learning whether that be a school, classroom, club, team, or other event. These recommendations are spread across many different parts of the education system.

Methods

In November, a subcommittee formed to review available survey data with Susan Young, Director of Data and Accountability for ASD-W. Students identified data from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Integrated Student Survey that pertained to their work which they presented in December to the full council. The Council was interested in the question of to what extent students feel they "belong at my school" and decided that 'belonging' could act as a way of measuring whether a student's diversity is being recognized and if they are feeling included in their school. Which is to say that if the school system is doing a good job on diversity and inclusion, then more students will feel they belong.

In summary, 54.3% of students responded that they felt they belonged at school either 'quite a bit' or 'a lot'; however, the Council identified that 45.7% of students feeling only 'somewhat', 'a little', or 'not at all' a sense of belonging to school, was worth further exploration. (see Figure 1)

Department of Education and Early Childhood Integrated Student Survey

Grades 6-12 Responses: Detailed Report 2021-2022

ASD-W (ASD-W) - DISTRICT

In collaboration with:
New Brunswick Health Council

26. I feel I belong at my school.	11.5%	11.3%	22.9%	27.9%	26.4%	8830
Resilience	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Quite a bit	A lot	# of Responses
To what extent do the statements below describe you?						

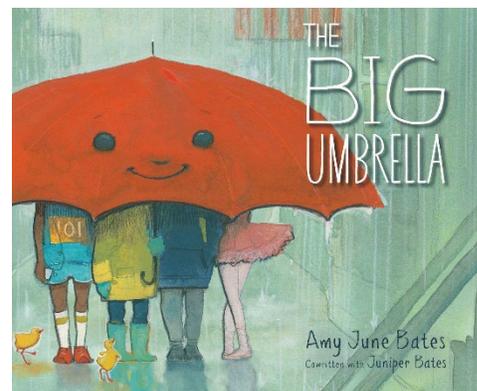
Figure 1. Data extracted from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Integrated Student Survey.

The Council selected three methods to gather further evidence about how students experience diversity, inclusion, and increase their sense of belonging, to be collected during the month of February, 2023. Across the three methods of research, the Council collected evidence from twelve schools.

The students would like to recognize Dimitri Pavlounis, Research Director at CIVIX Canada, for his ongoing commitment to work with the Council. Dimitri has led activities to help the Council establish norms for group discussion, confronting bias and in particular confirmation bias in research, and ongoing advice and support throughout this work.

Method 1. Visiting elementary classrooms

Councilors selected the book The Big Umbrella by Amy June Bates (2018) to read to elementary classrooms. After reading the book, councilors asked students two questions and recorded their answers on chart paper. All responses were reviewed and categorized into emerging themes – or a common story or idea even if the students used different words or examples to describe it.



1. What can you do to help everyone feel they belong?
2. What can the school do to help everyone feel they belong?

Councilors conducted this research at 7 schools, visiting 13 classrooms, representing urban and rural schools as well as K-2, 3-5, K-5, K-8, K-12 configurations.

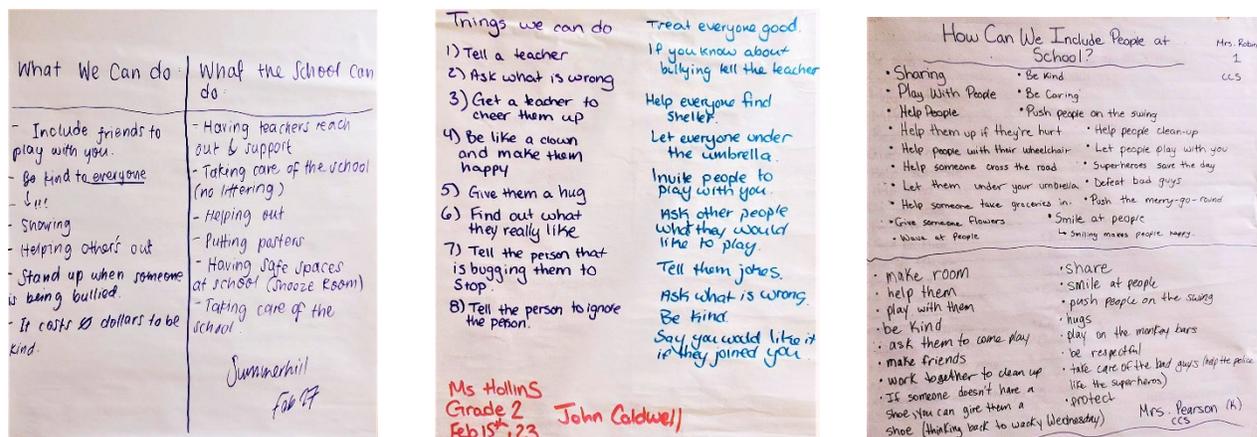


Figure 2. Three examples of chart papers used to collect student responses.

Method 2. Environmental audits

Councilors developed an environmental audit tool to assess aspects of the school's physical features and resources using a Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The Council looked for the following:

1. Languages and Cultures Represented Daily
2. Ability Resources
3. Student Work Visible
4. School Pride
5. Safe Spaces, Cultural Rooms, Spaces for Teacher-Student Interactions
6. Student Voice
7. Mental Health
8. Diversity Representation
9. Ongoing Communication of Opportunities in Schools

Audits were performed by two to three councilors, so that an 'outside eye' was always available. The data was aggregated from 12 schools: 1 (K-2 school), 1 (3-5 school), 2 (K-5 school), 1 (K-8), 2 (K-12), 1 (6-8), 2 (6-12), 2 (9-12) representing students in both urban and rural settings. The data was reviewed to identify areas of relative strength, areas that could be strengthened, and emerging themes.

Method 3. Open-ended question

Councilors created a single open-ended question to collect through a digital feedback form that would allow for anonymous results. Grades 4-12 students were able to respond to the question. The Council received 143 responses from students in 6 schools, representing views of students in Grades 4-12 in both urban and rural settings. Responses were read one-by-one and categorized into emerging themes.

Survey on Belonging

The purpose of this survey is to collect qualitative data on student inclusion and belonging. The Anglophone West School District Council of Student Leaders are looking for your input. We are interested in your own personal experiences. The data we analyzed from previous surveys shows that just over 50% of students feel a strong sense of belonging at school - but we would like this number to be higher. We are looking for your suggestions, - please provide a full explanation for your answer.

3. How can we help you feel more included within your school community to increase your sense of belonging at school? *

Enter your answer

Figure 3. Snapshot of the online survey's header and open-ended question.

Environmental Audit: Aggregated Data

5. Safe Spaces, Cultural Rooms, Spaces for Teacher Student Interactions (All these areas to be well communicated to all students and in locations respectful to students)			
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
	3	6	4
Evidence: Lounge room for free time Empty classrooms for talking Plenty of spaces are ready for student use but many are not visible or advertised and even veteran students may not know they exist Working on a 'snooze room' I CAN rules made by students to respect boundaries Sensory stations on each floor GSA Multiple resource rooms for everyone Student lounge in the future			

Figure 4. Snapshot of the summary of the environmental audits.

Guest Speakers

In April, the Council invited guest speakers who could personally discuss their experience with topic of diversity, inclusion, and belonging. The five guest speakers were:

Sarah Francis (First Nations Subject Coordinator for ASD-W)

Kelly Lamrock (Child and Youth Advocate for the Province of New Brunswick)

Dr. Casey Burkholder and Ph.D. candidate Melissa Keehn (PrideSwell and UNB Faculty of Education)

Matthew Martin (Black Lives Matter New Brunswick)

Ben McNamara (Inclusion NB)

The Council took time to review their recommendations after meeting with the guest speakers.

Overview of Findings

Findings from Picture Book Readings

Themes in “Things the Schools Can Do”:

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<i>Helping</i>	20	<i>Help open applesauce Help you get up when you trip on a rock.</i>
<i>More of the ‘Good Stuff’</i>	11	<i>Party every week More art</i>
<i>Things that make students feel good</i>	7	<i>Say nice things</i>
<i>Changes to the school environment</i>	6	<i>Make it fancier Take care of the school (no littering)</i>
<i>Inclusiveness</i>	5	<i>Make some posters to show people they belong</i>
<i>Sharing</i>	2	<i>Share food</i>

Themes in “Things the Students Can Do”:

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<i>Helping</i>	36	<i>Defeat the bad guys Help someone take groceries in</i>
<i>Being Inclusive</i>	34	<i>It costs zero dollars to be kind Tell a teacher if someone’s being left out</i>
<i>Things that make students feel good</i>	31	<i>Hold their hand and dance Give a flower</i>
<i>Good character traits</i>	20	<i>Be like a clown and make them happy Fill each other’s buckets</i>
<i>Sharing</i>	20	<i>If someone doesn’t have a shoe, you can give them a shoe</i>
<i>Protecting each other</i>	14	<i>Protect people on their journey Stand-up when someone is being bullied</i>

Findings from Environmental Audits

Strengths: Schools in the district are doing well regarding visual representation, resources available to students, and opportunities for extracurricular activities. Murals, posters, and student work that reflect the diversity of the student bodies are generally visible. These visuals contribute to a welcoming and inclusive environment. In addition, clubs and extracurriculars allow students to explore their interests, meet others with similar passions, and form a greater sense of community.

Weaknesses: The environmental audits revealed areas where the physical environment of schools needs improvement. Some concerns include classroom lighting is being harsh in some schools creating an uncomfortable learning environment for students. There is a lack of sufficient lounge areas, particularly for students with disabilities. Furthermore, the availability of safe spaces for students to feel supported, respected, and comfortable within their educational environment are limited. The presence of safe

adults, such as social workers and school counsellors, is not currently adequate to provide the necessary resources and support. Moreover, promotion of student resources is lacking, as they are primarily distributed upon individual requests. Addressing these deficiencies is crucial to foster a more diverse and inclusive atmosphere within our schools.

Main Theme: The audits have shown that visually, schools are doing well in creating an inclusive physical environment. However, the education behind these visuals needs work. The Council recommends ensuring student resources are promoted and not just given out when requested. It is crucial that all students feel supported and represented in their educational environment regardless of their backgrounds, and even because of their backgrounds.

Findings from Open Question Responses

Please note any spelling mistakes or grammatical issues were left in the examples so as not to alter the student's message.

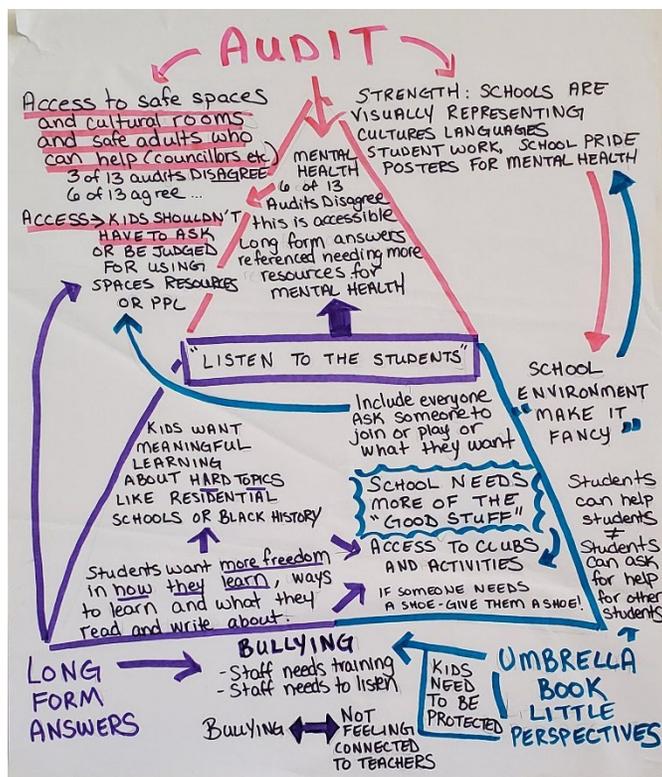
<i>Theme</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<i>No changes required</i>	35	<p><i>"I already feel included ☺"</i></p> <p><i>"I feel pretty fine at my school, there is not much that you can do to make me feel more included because my kind is a minority at this school but it's fine since I have my friends here."</i></p>
<i>Specific Activity Suggestions</i>	16	<i>"Well I feel like the school should make more teams of sports because i didn't make the team and there wasn't anything else to try out for"</i>
<i>Improved school resources</i>	12	<p><i>"listen when i ask for help."</i></p> <p><i>"Including a wider variety of mental health support around the school community would create a larger sense of belonging within the school, and well as addressing certain issues regarding discrimination around the school and community."</i></p> <p><i>"I think something that would help is smaller class rooms so you can make more friends and not be ignored or left out"</i></p>
<i>Access or changes to sports</i>	11	<p><i>"A weight room to work out in would be nice to have and would bring the people who use it close together."</i></p> <p><i>"I strongly believe we should have more different after school sports like baseball to make the students feel included and more happy everyday."</i></p>

		<i>"Well I feel like the school should make more teams of sports because i didn't make the team and there wasn't anything else to tryout for"</i>
<i>Increased freedoms</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>"There are too many rules and it just makes everyone feel isolated. We're not dumb the teachers just enjoy making stupid Rules..."</i> <i>"Lighten the dress code it's so I can feel comfortable to wear whatever I have at my home."</i> <i>"I think we should have more choices on people I could have in our class so we can feel like we aren't alone."</i>
<i>Addressing bullying</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>"i think it would be helpful to provide students with more information on minority groups (disabilities, race, lgbtqia+ etc) because a lot of exclusion comes from people not understanding or putting in effort to understand people who are different than them, which means they treat those people differently which can feel really bad"</i> <i>"I feel that there should be more awareness about cyber bullying."</i>
<i>Access or changes to clubs</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>"Have more clubs (book club, drama club, environmental club ect) because people have different interest have more school activity for people to be in groups."</i>
<i>Changes to learning environments or school organization</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>"I think that the school should add more things for the LGBTQIA+. Like more gender neutral bathrooms."</i>
<i>Specific to school staff</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>"too many people get into fights and our school doesn't do much they suspend them then the student comes back and gets into another fight. so basically I don't feel like I belong because I don't feel safe."</i> <i>"more education resources. the places with more money spent on education often have better resources and teachers. also, learning flexibility."</i>
<i>Food security</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>"by making vending machines less expensive"</i>

<p>Focus on social interactions</p>	<p>6</p>	<p>I also think we should have more accommodations for mental health because they teach us about it but there's nothing we can really do in the moment without getting trouble"</p> <p>"I wish some people would give me personal space when I ask."</p> <p>"I don't feel like I belong most of the time because I feel cut-off from the rest of the student body, only having one or two people I can hang out with. I suppose a way that could help me feel like I belong at my school could be a type of peer friendship program, maybe, where there is someone you could go to if something is troubling you or if you just want to hang out with someone."</p> <p>"Teach people to be more understandable of mental issues"</p>
<p>Left Blank</p>	<p>12</p>	

Summary Graphic Organizer

Through dialogue and conversation with the full Council of Student Leaders, the findings from the three data sources were triangulated. This graphic organizer was designed to demonstrate the connections between the three data sources.



Recommendations

MEANINGFUL LEARNING ON HARD TOPICS

- Teach heavy topics without ‘tiptoeing’ or ‘sugar coating’ but do keep it age-appropriate.
- Keep the heavy topics relevant by teaching about them in a deep way over time, instead of mentioning them one day and never talking about them again.
- Address topics like addiction, residential schools, intergenerational trauma, MMIW, the 60s Scoop, discrimination, homelessness, bullying, etc.
- Use storytelling as an effective way to teach.
- **Kids also UNLEARN at school: Teach kindness to kids.**

STUDENT VOICE AND FREEDOM OF CHOICE IN THE CLASSROOM

- Allow kids to express themselves.
- Allow for kids to be curious.
- Allow for flexibility in the learning such as:
 - o What is taught on a certain day,
 - o Who you sit with and work with,
 - o Having choices in how you present your information and learning such as a test or a project.
- Designated study time / work time for Grades 10, 11, and 12 students.
- Longer breaks.
- Students feel ‘burnt out’. If students finish their work – don’t pile on more!

SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

- Opportunities for student voice in regard to sports and clubs.
- Ability and identity should not be barriers to accessing school activities.
- Try to offer new selections of clubs and sports to accommodate all student interests.
- Value sports and clubs equitably for funding and support.

ACCESSIBLE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- Ensure social settings are inclusive to all people with physical disabilities (desks, cafeteria seating, sound etc.).
- All students need full access to buildings, classrooms, courses, and social environments.
- Flexible seating arrangements for classrooms because students also deserve to be comfortable.

MAKE IT FANCY – MAKE IT RELEVANT

- Work with your visuals in the school. Build them into stories. Work those stories into everything.
- Keep visuals in the school up to date and fresh.
- Represent different students’ artwork and local artists (be intentional)
 - o Represent LGBTQI2S+, Multicultural, First Nations, Newcomers, etc.

NEWCOMER SUPPORT

- Have guidelines for using funding from fee paying students because sometimes fee-paying students feel used for the money they pay.
- Provide resources that are easy to access and understand to help Newcomer students with:
 - o Course Selection,
 - o University applications,
 - o Timelines and processes.
- Provide EAL training for school counselors.
- Ensure academic support for EAL students as they study in regular classrooms.

FOOD SECURITY

- Ensure access to breakfast and lunch programs.
- Add vending machines into school for easier access at any time. Ensure they are checked and refilled regularly.
- Ensure there is access to healthy food options (not processed) at school for minimal cost.
- Ensure that schools provide food that meets student needs which may be dietary, religious, or cultural.

GUEST SPEAKERS FOR SCHOOLS

- Be intentionally diverse.
- Speakers who can personalize the stories - not PowerPoints!
- Speakers who bring different perspectives.
- Speakers who represent marginalized groups.

TEACHER AND EDUCATION ASSISTANT TRAINING

- Provide training on the following topics:
 - o How to assist with different mental health issues (such as panic attacks) for teachers who are not school counsellors.
 - o The Inclusion NB presentation presented by Ben McNamara.
 - o How to run safe spaces effectively.
 - o How to work with students involved in bullying.

Mental health is the foundation for everything. Often issues such as bullying, discrimination, lack of inclusion, etc., can be traced back to poor mental health and so it is essential to establish a strong foundation of mental health for students. Making changes to improve students' mental health will guide students in the direction of diversity and inclusion.

MENTAL HEALTH

Recommendations for the implementation of safe physical spaces that help or improve mental health:

1. Create a comprehensive guide or infographic identifying safe people, resources, in-class vs out-of-class resources, and safe rooms.
2. Evaluate safe spaces regularly and ensure they are accessible to all students. Train properly qualified staff to run safe spaces.

3. Build trust between students and staff by creating a safe and supportive environment where students feel heard and supported.
4. Remove barriers to mental health support by ensuring confidentiality, decreasing wait times, and making support available without an appointment.

Recommendations that deal with mental health as a whole:

1. Utilize AI tools and technology to provide anonymous and immediate access to mental health support for students.
2. Improve access to mental health resources for both students and teachers.
3. Increase access to support adults, such as social workers and school counsellors.
4. Arrange for regular check-ins with every student, including follow-ups for students who identify as needing support.
5. Incorporate mental health education and strategies into regular classes, such as Physical Education or a set period.
6. Address teacher gossip and ensure student confidentiality is protected by providing safe spaces for students and teachers to report incidents of overhearing teachers talking about students.
7. Ensure teachers have identified people and confidential places to go to debrief or work through student problem-solving so it won't be overheard.

Acknowledgements

A big thank you to the twelve schools that welcomed us as researchers:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ✓ Assiniboine Elementary School | ✓ Harvey High School |
| ✓ Bliss Carman Middle School | ✓ John Caldwell School |
| ✓ Centreville Community School | ✓ Leo Hayes High School |
| ✓ Chipman Forest Avenue School | ✓ Montgomery Street School |
| ✓ Geary Elementary Community School | ✓ Nackawic High School |
| ✓ Hartland Community School | ✓ Summerhill Elementary School |

Superintendent David McTimoney for creating and supporting this council in its work. Thank you also for the hoodies, we love them!

Beth Christie, Eric Church, Susan Galbraith, and Jennifer Keating for their work in organizing and supervising meetings.

Dimitri Pavlounis of CIVIX Canada for providing guidance in collaborative group work, analyzing data, and writing recommendations.

Ms. Yvonne Caverhill, Principal of Chipman Forest Avenue School for stepping in as a chauffer and last minute overnight supervisor.

Carleton North High School for hosting our final meeting and the Culinary Technology class for the excellent treats.

The following guest speakers:

- Sarah Francis (First Nations Subject Coordinator for ASD-W)
- Kelly Lamrock (Child and Youth Advocate for the Province of New Brunswick)
- Dr. Casey Burkholder and Ph.D. candidate Melissa Keehn (PrideSwell and UNB Faculty of Education)
- Matthew Martin (Black Lives Matter New Brunswick)
- Ben McNamara (Inclusion NB)
- The Honourable Margaret Johnson

The ASD-W Transportation Team and bus drivers.

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Kingswood Lodge and Catering.

Kingswood Entertainment Centre.

The Woodstock Best Western Hotel and Convention Centre.

The Amsterdam Inn and Suites Florenceville.

Finally, a big thank you to our families and our schools for supporting us in taking on this extra responsibility this year.

Members of the ASD-W Council of Student Leaders 2022-2023

President – Hayden Sparkes, Fredericton High School

Vice-President – Kaylee Pitts, McAdam High School

Secretary – Madison Mulherin, John Caldwell School

Kristina Rawn-Brown, Cambridge-Narrows Community School

Mackenzie Keilty, Canterbury High School

Anna Brownridge, Carleton North High School

Claire Cummings, Carleton North High School

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Brianne Hutchins, Chipman Forest Avenue School

Sumou Shawesh, Fredericton High School

Anisha Anupindi, Fredericton High School

Melika Bagherpour, Fredericton High School

Layne Ross, Hartland Community School

Alice Vautour, Harvey High School

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Riley Underwood-Charters, Oromocto High School

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Anna Carmichael-Keenan, Woodstock High School