

# More than Words: Bringing Mission to Life



at  
Crescent School  
Toronto, Ontario

*June 2022*



The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous our world is. For a decade, the Center for Curriculum Redesign (CCR) has worked to equip modern learners to thrive in this world with a 4-Dimensional Education.<sup>1</sup> A 4D Education recognizes that the Knowledge dimension—which traditional education has exclusively focused on—is not sufficient. A 4D Education pairs Knowledge with competencies from the three other dimensions: Skills (such as creativity and collaboration), Character (such as resilience and ethics), and Meta-Learning (such as learning how to learn with a growth mindset).

CCR’s 4D School partnership with Crescent School, an independent school in Toronto serving over 750 students in grades 3-12, has operationalized cutting-edge practices and research to equip learners with the dimensions necessary for positive and healthy lives and work. The partnership has enabled global thought leadership on *how* to close this gap of a deliberate, demonstrable, explicit, systematic, and comprehensive approach to teaching competencies.

### The Pathway from Mission to Reality

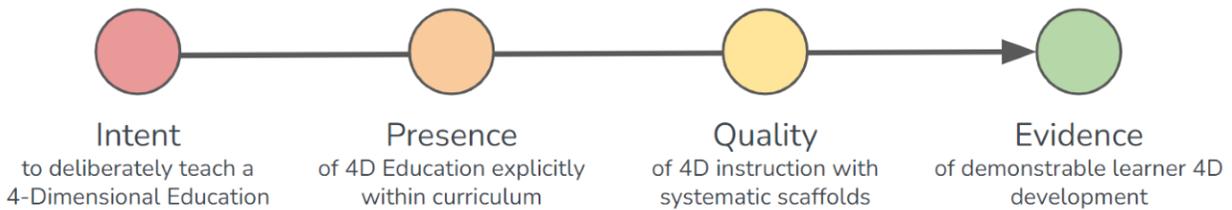
Crescent School utilizes a Portrait of a Graduate to spotlight the outcomes of its graduates. This Portrait, as follows, features three guiding questions and six character qualities. Bolded are 4D Competencies or synonyms for competencies, as identified in the Competency Framework.<sup>2</sup>

Who am I?	How do I lead?	What is my legacy?
Moral person with the <b>courage</b> to uphold and act upon the highest standards of <b>ethical</b> behavior.	A positive <b>leader</b> who builds relationships and understands the importance of serving others in order to inspire action and accomplishment.	An engaged <b>citizen</b> who respects people’s differences, is <b>mindful</b> of interconnectivity, and seeks betterment in his local and global community.
<b>Self-aware</b> and self-regulating with a strong sense of purpose, agency, and potential.	A <b>critical thinker</b> who listens clearly, <b>communicates</b> effectively, and <b>collaborates</b> well.	<b>Adaptable, resourceful,</b> and <b>creative</b> in meeting the challenges of an increasingly complex world.

With this compass in hand, Crescent already demonstrates a mission that features teaching 4-Dimensional Competencies. To ensure graduates *do* leave with all of the above traits, Crescent’s partnership with CCR has focused on utilizing a systematic approach to move from *intent* to teach competencies to *evidence* of learner proficiency:

<sup>1</sup> Fadel, Trilling, Bialik. *Four-Dimensional Education*. 2015

<sup>2</sup> <https://4dedu.org/competencies/>



Through workshops, addresses, community meetings, and even the display of classroom posters highlighting 4D Competencies, Crescent built a culture of intent. Administrators, teachers, and students recognize the shared educational destination and its transformative potential. With this shared destination, they then could determine how to get there together.

### An Explicit Presence

4D Competencies are often taught in classrooms—science experiments may inspire curiosity or writing assignments often exercise creativity. However, without an *explicit presence* for competencies in curricular (and extracurricular) activities, the development of competencies is left up to chance. Additionally, competencies can mean different things to different people. The 4-Dimensional Framework breaks competencies down into subcompetencies, which allow for the precision necessary to drive meaningful improvement in the classroom. It also provides synonyms and related ideas for the competency, so goals and strategies for improving proficiency can be clear and specific:

## Resilience

*Character Dimension Competency*



<b>Subcompetencies</b>	RES1: Adapting flexibly
	RES2: Building strong social networks
	RES3: Managing stress and expressing emotions appropriately
	RES4: Orienting to a meaning or purpose
	RES5: Persevering through challenges but seeking help when needed

*Related Ideas: Perseverance, Grit, Persistence*

Crescent leadership partnered with teachers to leverage CCR’s research on embedding competencies into disciplines,<sup>3</sup> utilizing the subcompetencies to map these learning outcomes explicitly to certain subjects and activities that are best suited for them. Although most competencies can be taught in many subjects, certain disciplines feature competencies that are *fundamental* to the learning experience. By holistically mapping the competencies to Crescent’s subjects, departments can share strategies for teaching a single competency of

<sup>3</sup> [Embedding Competencies within Disciplines Deliberately, Explicitly, and Systematically](#). 2021

focus, and a scope and sequence can be designed to ensure graduates have opportunities across their course schedule to develop at all of the competencies. Similarly, extracurricular activities can share in the power of this unified framework, with areas like robotics helping students practice critical thinking, or athletics facilitating leadership opportunities.

## **Developing Quality**

With the competencies mapped to subjects, Crescent elected to start disciplinary redesign processes with its mathematics and physical education departments, leveraging already scheduled curricular reviews to kickstart the work.

Working with 4D Coaches, these departments unpacked what the competency would look like in their subject. In mathematics, teachers discussed how a growth mindset is essential for each student to keep trying on challenging problem sets, or for each student who struggles to identify “as a math person.” In physical education, teachers discussed how students could become more self-aware and metacognitive about their own fitness and health, considering which exercises and nutritional choices work best for them.

In workshops, teachers examined some best practices for infusing the competency into their lessons. Then, utilizing a 4D Lesson Planning template, teachers delivered a sample competency-infused lesson to students, and discussed as departments what worked and where there were areas for growth. One mathematics class used the live-surveying tool Mentimeter to ask students about how comfortable they feel asking others for help, a facet of growth mindset. Then, after introducing students to a new concept of proving trigonometric identities, students practiced asking one another for help. Afterward, they reflected upon what was helpful in the experience, and what was scary. Another class showcased videos of famous figures, such as Michael Jordan and Oprah Winfrey, detailing some of their biggest failures, and demonstrating how those failures led them to grow and later achieve success.

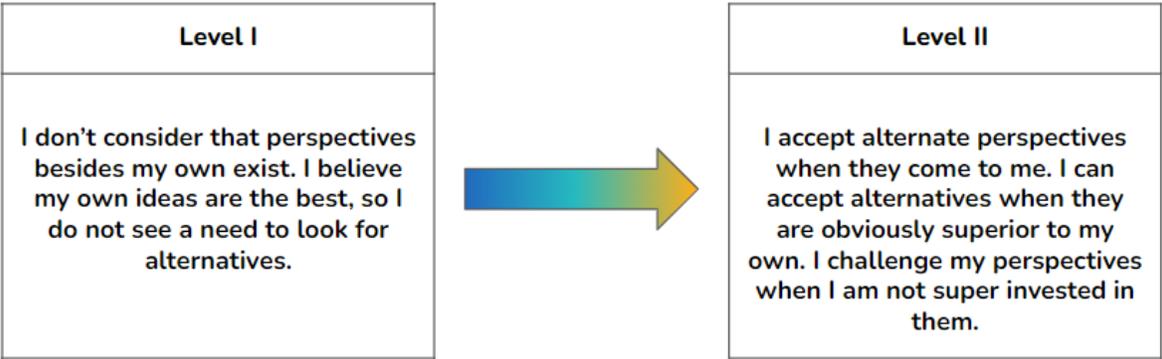
One physical education class, meanwhile, used SMART goals to target a goal-setting facet of metacognition. Students set their own goals for how they wanted to improve in a unit in which many students played lacrosse for the first time and reflected on which elements of the game they most liked. Department-wide, teachers tied the subcompetencies to their units, establishing them as learning objectives in the same way they do with content standards.

## **Establishing Evidence of Success**

With teachers deliberately utilizing techniques and best practices in their infusion of competencies, Crescent students access cutting-edge tactics which can facilitate their understanding. Through the use of 4D Growth Rubrics, teachers can establish benchmarks for proficiency across a lifetime and have conversations with learners about strengths and growth areas. Teachers can develop formative methods of gathering evidence for learner proficiency:

CRE1: Generating and seeking new ideas			
Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
I can't come up with anything worth mentioning on my own. Sometimes I wait for inspiration, but it just doesn't come. As soon as I encounter an idea that works, I go with it.	When I come up with ideas myself, they inevitably seem unoriginal. I try to find a few good ideas in familiar places (e.g., asking friends or a Google search) to pick the best one.	I can generate a reasonable number of possible ideas and will share them even if some seem bad at first glance. I look for inspiration in many different places and use different strategies for pushing myself to think of more even after I have good ones.	I am bursting with new ideas, and I often have so many that it's difficult to pick just one. Almost everything is a source of novel inspiration, and I curate sources specific to the problem at hand.

The physical education department, for example, discussed some look-fors that would help them see how students were developing their self-awareness in a lacrosse unit. By checking on how effectively elementary students might receive and apply feedback on their technique, they could gain evidence of student proficiency at “considering alternatives and different perspectives,” a metacognition subcompetency:



- When determining what makes a “good pass,” learner focuses on only one trait (like power), instead of multiple possibilities.
- Learner doesn't try different passing techniques and just sticks with their own way.
- Learner ignores feedback and doesn't make adjustments

- Learner participates in trying to determine what can make one pass better than another
- Learner tries different techniques, and if their way isn't the best way, makes adjustments
- Learner shows active listening skills when receiving feedback, considers making changes, and tries out new adjustments

**Looking Ahead**

As Crescent looks ahead, other departments will continue this journey of moving from intent to evidence, demonstrably bolstering learner outcomes in their subject's selected competency of focus. Doing so will enable Crescent to explore pathways for utilizing the 4D Growth Rubrics in providing feedback to learners on their strengths and growth areas through the Crescent Diploma. By embedding competencies directly into the Crescent Diploma, the school sets itself

apart as one that establishes benchmarks for competency proficiency, something lacking globally from the aforementioned CCR jurisdictional research.

Additionally, Crescent is transitioning to a six-term schedule. By doing so, Crescent will create opportunities to focus on the knowledge dimension, with the flexibility to offer modules with the modern content missing in traditional education. For example, CCR is developing “Modern Mathematics” modules for the PISA Primo 2026 assessment which cover in-need areas like algorithms, game theory, and complex systems. With a six-term schedule, teachers have additional flexibility to design and integrate modern content, and also to find unique integration pathways for the competencies.

Finally, the Crescent Centre for Boys’ Education (CCBS), a school research and professional development arm, will collaborate with CCR in pilots of its C.A.R.E. (Competency Assessment, Reporting, and Evidence) System. With CCR researchers and coaches partnering with the faculty and students of CCBS, Crescent will be able to help trial and provide feedback on a cutting-edge system for gathering evidence on learner proficiency in competencies, and developing strategies for improvement.

Every day reveals new challenges that today’s students will need to face—from climate change, to the risks and opportunities of artificial intelligence, to increasing social injustices, and political hyperpartisanship. These challenges make the work conducted at 4D Schools, like Crescent, all the more paramount, in creating graduates with a 4-Dimensional Education and Crescent Diploma ready to use their competencies and modernized education to create a better world.