

# Connecting with Parents through a Customized School Chatbot



PROBLEM OF  
PRACTICE

Secondary schools share a substantial amount of information with parents and students about various school based initiatives, events, and schedules. However, finding or accessing the information in a quick and easy way can be a challenge. Parents and students often become dependent on the Teacher or the office staff to provide them with the information they are looking for which can be time-consuming and not instantaneous- creating a barrier in communication between the school and the community.

There is a need for a streamlined, accessible communication tool that can provide instant responses to common queries, reducing the workload on school staff and ensuring parents receive accurate information promptly.

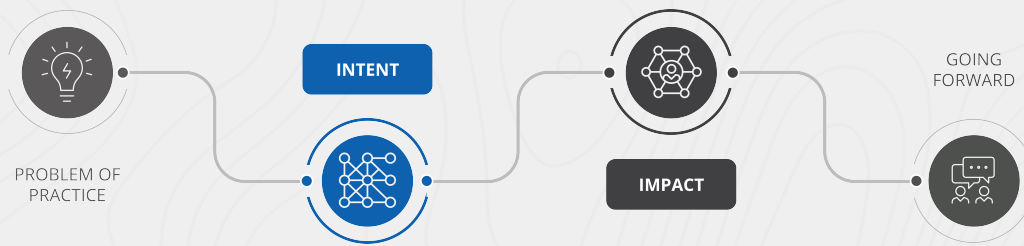


Organization: **Peel District School Board**  
Province: Ontario  
Date: Spring 2025  
Lead: **Megha Raj**, Vice Principal- Heart Lake Secondary School  
**Carol Ann Mascherin**, Principal- Heart Lake Secondary School

**Connecting with Parents through a Customized School Chatbot. Peel District School Board**

Integrating AI in Education: Transforming Learning — An AI Use Case Initiative for Canadian Education

<https://c21canada.org/ai-use-case-initiative/> © 2025 C21 Canada. All Rights Reserved.



# Intent

Customized AI chatbot's can provide specific information to communities. Instead of having to search for information, keep track of details, or attempt to remember where or how information was provided, a customized chatbot can:

- provide information instantly.
- improve communication between parents and the school.
- be available to parents at all hours of the day and everyday-centering them and their time.
- reduce the workload of office staff or teachers as parents and students can refer to the chatbot.
- personalize information for parents. For instance, if a parent would like to know when a specific exam for a specific course is running, they can access just this information.

During the 2024-2025 school year, Heart Lake Secondary School introduced a customized AI chatbot to families called Harry Hurricane.

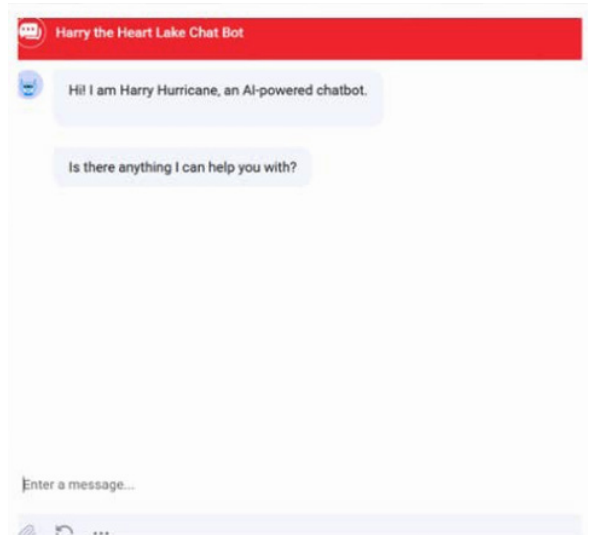
**Phase 1:** This initial phase involved developing a chatbot for Heart Lake SS to familiarize parents with the tool and the purpose of the tool. The goal of this first phase was to integrate the chatbot into the school's learning environment and encourage parents to habitually use the tool, thereby enhancing their capacity to utilize it effectively.

**Phase 2:** This second phase focuses on building Teacher capacity in developing their own AI chatbots for the classroom. This specific AI chatbot would have information about the course and curriculum and used as a support tool in the classroom learning environment or a tool that provides parents with specific information about a course.

Harry Hurricane was specifically used at parent/teacher interviews to help parents navigate through the building and to access information about the evening.

“ Staff and students who tried the chatbot provided positive feedback in relation to the instant information and the possible workload reduction. ”

—Megha Raj, Vice Principal Heart Lake Secondary School



Harry Hurricane, personalized AI chat bot at Heart Lake SS.



# Impact

Harry Hurricane was developed using the application Appy Pie. Appy Pie allows users to create customized AI chatbots for specific purposes with information uploaded to it through a PDF file. The pre-configured code reads the uploaded documents and shares the information through a chatbot that had its own link.

At Heart Lake’s parent/teacher interview night, a link to the Harry Hurricane AI chatbot was sent out to parents and signs were posted around the school's front foyer with a QR code which led anyone that scanned the code to the chatbot. We emailed parents the link to the chatbot on the day of the event, which unfortunately, did not provide much time for them to engage with the bot.

Throughout both semesters, the Vice-Principal uploaded information to the chatbot. In the second semester, the curricular Head of Student Services uploaded information to the chatbot about the school's Student Services department.

Semester 1- Parent Teacher Interview		Semester 2- Parent Teacher Interview	
Application End User- Information Input	Chatbot End User- Information Output	Application End User- Information Input	Chatbot End User- Information Output
<i>User- Vice Principal.</i> Information uploaded: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Date, time, location of parent/teacher interview.</li> <li>• Information on how to book an interview and instructions if parent or teacher <u>is</u> not available.</li> <li>• Teacher location.</li> <li>• School map.</li> <li>• Room locations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents</li> <li>• Student leaders who were guiding parents and answering questions.</li> <li>• Front office staff.</li> </ul>	<i>User- Guidance Head.</i> Information uploaded: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Services website.</li> <li>• List of Guidance Counsellors and support staff.</li> <li>• Information about Student <u>Services'</u> Pathway Presentation at Parent/Teacher Interview night.</li> </ul> <i>User- Vice Principal.</i> Information uploaded: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Date, time, location of parent/teacher interview.</li> <li>• Information on how to book an interview and instructions if parent or teacher <u>is</u> not available.</li> <li>• <u>Teacher</u> location in a chart.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents</li> </ul>



# Impact

The application used to create the personalized chatbot did not work as anticipated. Specifically, the chatbot could not read and share information presented in a table or chart. Moreover, specific prompts were required for specific information to be accessed as opposed to general prompts that would yield the information fed into the bot. Despite these limitations, the application was easy to use as the chatbot was designed using a pre-coded template, requiring users to only set up the interface of the chatbot and upload information through a PDF file.

In semester one, parents, student leaders helping at parent/teacher interview night, and the office staff experienced confusion in using the chatbot. There was a lack of instructions provided and an assumption was made that parents, students, and the office staff knew how to use an AI chatbot. In semester two, office staff were more comfortable making use of it. Capacity was also built with the Student Services department as they uploaded information to Harry Hurricane for the event.

In semester one, there were 13 instances of the bot being used at the parent/teacher interview night. In semester two, there were 11 instances of Harry Hurricane being used at the parent/teacher interview night.

## Professional Learning insights

### What Worked Well

- **Understanding of the Purpose:** The concept of having a personalized chatbot for the school was shown to be useful once office staff and other staff in the building understood the purpose.
- **Ease of Chatbot Development:** Appy Pie allowed for a quick and easy way to develop a chatbot and upload information.
- **Positive Feedback:** Staff and students who tried the chatbot provided positive feedback in relation to the instant information and the possible reduction in workload.

### What Can Be Improved

- **Communicating about Harry Hurricane:** Communicating with families can be improved. While the link was emailed to parents on the day of parent-teacher interviews, additional steps could have been taken such as sharing the link earlier and providing instructions along with the tool.
- **Building Capacity with Parents:** Providing instructions on how to use the chatbot to parents would have been beneficial. Many individuals are unfamiliar with using a chatbot, so guidance on its purpose and usage would have supported parents in effectively utilizing the tool.

The PL Coach assigned to the project supported the project by finding other tools that could achieve the same goal. They also advocated to the School Board for access to Co-Pilot Studio, another AI chatbot development tool that is housed within the Microsoft environment.

# Going Forward

GOING  
FORWARD



At Heart Lake Secondary School, we will continue to find a solution for efficient and accessible communication for our school community through AI. Though there are a limited number of AI chatbot development applications that offer quick and easy creation of chatbots, we will continue exploring different options and trying a variety of tools.

Additionally, we aim to implement AI communication tools in other schools within our area to build capacity among parents. This will ensure that when parents transition from middle school to secondary school, they are already familiar with the communication tool being used.

In our journey to develop an AI chatbot, we focused on several critical aspects to ensure its effectiveness and security:

- **Security:** There are a lot of concerns around the security of AI and the programs in which we are using. The PDSB is in the process of determining who needs access to specific information, the sources of information and where data is being stored as the Board is guided by legislation that upholds data privacy.
- **Data Access:** Data access is another piece that is to be considered. Thinking about who has the ability to create a tool, where the information is coming from, who wrote the information, and how is it being accessed.
- **Data Usage:** The chatbot utilizes anonymized and aggregated data to improve its responses and functionality. Personal data is never used without explicit consent. In regard to a personalized school chatbot it is important to consider who will be using the data.
- **Board Policy:** Since AI is relatively new, the PDSB is taking a measured approach to its use. The Board is still careful about its use and ensures that data is safe and reliable.
- **Data Labeling:** Resources need to be meticulously labeled to enhance the chatbot's learning capabilities. This includes categorizing data to improve accuracy and relevance. At the moment this is taking time for the Board as there are limited human resources to data label.
- **Information Sources:** The chatbot presents information from current and vetted sources, ensuring reliability and accuracy. It does not rely on outdated or unverified resources.

[Try the Demo Chatbot](#)

<https://c21canada.org/ai-use-case-initiative/> © 2025 C21 Canada. All Rights Reserved. Dell and other trademarks are trademarks of Dell Inc. or its subsidiaries. Other trademarks may be trademarks of their respective owners.