

TDSB Task Force on the success of Students of Somali Descent
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday February 19, 2013

Time: 6:00PM

Location: 5050 Yonge Street – Executive Meeting Room

IN ATTENDANCE: Abdi Aidid, Abubakar Hagi, Ahmed Elmi, Ahmed Omar, Ali Abdullahi, Ali Mohamed, Faisal Omar, Fatouma Ahmed, Hassan Ibrahim, Hamdi Mohamed, Haweiya Egeh, Idil Burale, Jim Spyropoulos, Trustee John Hastings, Trustee Maria Rodrigues Marja Tiilikainen, Mohamed Abdullahi, Mohamed Sambul, Munira Abukar, Mustafa Abdi, Rayaana Elmi, Shadia Abess, Zahra Hassan.

Regrets: Abdifatah Warsame, Trustee Chris Bolton, Mohamed Haji-Nur, Muna Ali, Patrick Knight.

Minute Taker: Zahra Hassan

AGENDA ITEMS

1. Dinner

2. Welcome

- Ali Mohamed chairing the meeting.
- Meeting called to order at 6:18PM

3. Approval of Minutes (February 13, 2013)

- Minutes approved

4. Debrief on information from February 13, 2013 Meeting

Meeting with Dr. Brown

- It was an important/ informative meeting – we received the information we needed.
- We had a lot of questions prepared prior to the meeting but they were not all answered.
- Effective- we seem to be heading in the right direction
- We should have coordinated the questions prior to the meeting
- Some of the answers dragged out
- Let us now get beyond the research and into planning

Research Summary: (Further research is available when and if requested)

Achievement of Somali-speaking students – 5 Conclusions

1. Based on 2006 TDSB cohort study data, self-identified Somali-speaking students graduate from secondary school at a lower rate than “all students”.
2. Based on 2006 TDSB cohort study data, self-identified Somali-speaking students, apply and are accepted to post-secondary educational institutions at rates lower than “all students”.
3. Self-identified Somali-speaking students males have a much greater chance of leaving school before graduation than do Somali-speaking females.
 - Both Somali-speaking male/females leave school before graduation at a higher rate than “all students”
4. Based on 2006 TDSB cohort study data, self-identified Somali-speaking students have a higher likelihood of being enrolled in “Applied” level courses than do “all students”.
5. For the 2006 grade 9 cohort, Somali-speaking students were more likely to be suspended than “all students”
 - The older group of Somali-speaking students had a higher likelihood of being identified as special-Ed students than current students (29% with Special Education needs in 2006 vs 17% as of October 31, 2011).

Census Portraits (source: 2006 Student Census and 2008 Parent Census)

- Poverty is a key issue – Somali students are most likely to come from households with two of

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the lowest income groups than any other group in the TDSB.

- Somali parents expect their children to attend university.
- Somali parents are more involved in their children's education in and outside of school compared to the overall population –most of their children attend 'Model Schools" which have extra support staff to engage parents.
- Somali students have less access to activities and opportunities outside of school especially in the arts/music in comparison to other groups.
- Somali students feel safe in school, enjoy school, feel school is a friendly/welcoming place and feel safe outside of school property at the same or higher rate than the TDSB average.
- Somali students answer questions in class, speak up in class, participate in class activities/discussion, get along well with other students and feel accepted by other students at a higher rate than the overall TDSB.
- Somali students reported high self-perceived abilities in oral communications, reading, writing, social, problem-solving and leadership than the overall TDSB average. Somali students perform better than students from Caribbean and West African background but they are still underperforming compared to the overall population.

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5. Begin to Create Task Force' s Plan of Action

Question: How will we go about engaging the community?

Jim: Reach out to the community to not just find out not just what they are experiencing but also what they would like to see change?

Ali M: We need to have questions to ask the community? And who we need to include in the discussion?

- We need to focus on young people both youth who are in school but also those who left early. We need to go beyond the student conference and capture the voices that are unheard including youth who would not be attending the conference.
- Focusing on youth may also mean separating youth from adults/parents
- Have trustees who are interested in sponsor meetings in their communities.
- Teachers and administrative staff (i.e. principals, vice-principals, etc.) should be solicited for input.
- Involve the Masjids (mosques) -they have huge support with the parents and are frequented by parents and youth regularly. Potentially have a community consultation at a mosque.
- Advertise in the media both print and Somali TV programs to get the message to the community, especially parents; can also do outreach at mosques.
- Have materials to handout to the community.
- Include students/parents/teachers/admin staff and have community meetings in the East/West/Downtown that are well advertise to the community.
- Need to use social media as an advertisement tool to get the youth out.
- Engage Somali teachers who know the system but never worked for the TDSB and those who are working in the TDSB.
- Non-Somali teachers who work at schools with large Somali student populations.
- Community meeting with students representing different schools.
- Possibly include staff that help in supplementary/remedial efforts for students (i.e. ESL, special education staff)
- Include culturally sensitive training for teachers.
- Meeting between teachers and students - the core problem is what is taking place in the classrooms. We need to hear the voices of the students, focusing on high school students- 15+years of age.
- Engage the entire community so that they have input and ownership in the recommendations to avoid other groups from emerging and trying to recreate the process.
- Engage social workers and mental health workers within the school system
- We cannot expect people to come out to us, we need to go door-to-door to get the information and speak to them in their comfort zone.
- Engage Somali community leaders.
- Go beyond teachers and look at the curriculum to make it more relevant to the students.
- Make use of arts/film to look at identity. Have Arts-based organizations come to our schools and engage the students.
- Include other institution such as the Toronto Police and Toronto Community Housing.
- TDSB needs to take serious ownership-we need to have them there.
- Issue of marginalization in the classrooms.
- We need to think beyond the Somali identity -we belong to the larger Canadian society.
- Session with parents -what they need or lacking.
- Important to engage kids as young as grade 4. Dropping out is a gradual process -it does not start in high school.
- We need to be cautious of including the police/TCHC - these institutions are intimidating to many groups. We need to be careful in how we invite them and include them in the process.

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- The Police and TCHC are key stakeholders in our schools and it can be dangerous to not include them. Also living in volatile community or having the police at your school affects your education.
 - We do not want to hear from the police right now but at some point it is important to include them after the results.
 - Important to have the police from key divisions with large Somali population.
- Include local post-secondary institution - they are not aware of the challenges faced by students- they create structural barriers in their admissions. Need to look at other pathways to postsecondary.
- As a community we stay quiet about certain issues for fear it will affect our livelihood; must be cognizant of this dynamic
- We need to be very careful in how we use our words to not offend certain people.
- Need to look at positive/inviting words instead of the term "meeting"; use more "impactful" language (i.e. Forum, Consultation, etc.)
- Look at online arrangements to capture the voice of those who will not/cannot attend the meetings.
- Need to look at how we can approach Somali mothers -small groups seem to work best.
- Need to educate people who have a real interest in helping our youth.
- Our community meetings need to be realist and research centered - need to have clear predetermined questions.
- We have no choice in who we engage; the Task Force belongs to the community. The Somali community is over analyzed and over researched and it is important to examine why we are engaging the community.
- Process needs to concentrate on where/with whom/what we ask and while we are there ask questions that are geared towards recommendations and bring them forwards.

Task Force Sub-Committees:

Agreement: 6 Meetings

- 1 Teachers meeting (Both Somali and non-Somali)
- 1 East town-hall meeting
- 1 Downtown town-hall meeting
- 3 West town-hall meeting

- **East Sub-Committee Members:**
 - Hassan I-Lead
 - Shadia ATask: Look into logistics of community consultations (location, dates, etc.)

- **Downtown Sub-Committee Members:**
 - Fatouma A- Lead
 - Mohamed A
 - Abubakar HTask: Look into logistics of community consultations (location, dates, etc.)

- **West Sub-Committee Members:**
 - Ali A -Lead
 - Munira A
 - Ahmed O
 - Ahmed ETask: Look into logistics of community consultations (location, dates, etc.)

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▪ **Teachers Sub-Committee Members:**

- Ahmed O -Lead
- Faisal O
- Abubakar H

Task: connect with the TDSB Equitable and Inclusive Schools office to look at how to engage teachers during the student conference

▪ **Research Sub-Committee Members:**

- Ahmed E- Lead
- Mohamed S.
- Idil B
- Abdi A
Haweiya E

Task: Look into Portuguese and First Nations Task Force questions and present draft questions relevant for the Somali Task Force to the committee during next meeting

▪ **Outreach Sub-Committee Members:**

- Munira A -Lead
- Ahmed E-Lead
- Ali A
- Abdi A
- Hassan I
- Ali M

Task: Look into outreach strategies (tv advertisement, print, social media, ect)

6. Discuss dates for upcoming meetings

- Next Meeting: Tuesday March 5th, 5:30PM

7. Other Business

- Share minutes under Task Force webpage – **All in favor**
- Suggestion: create an email were members of the public can send their comments/questions and communicate with the Task Force – **All in favor**
- Have Task Force webpage under TDSB website or new host? – **No consensus reached**
 - Issue of resources; who will manage the email account and respond to inquiries/questions?

Next Meeting:	Tuesday March 5 th , 2013 5:30PM Dinner 6:00PM-8:00PM Meeting
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ADJOURNED:	8:45PM
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