

**Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Enhancing Equity Task Force**

Ward Forum 7: Trustee Tiffany Ford, Trustee Alexandra Lulka

Date: May 23, 2017

Time: 6:30 - 8:30pm

Location: Oakdale Park Middle School

PURPOSE:

* To hear from participants the ideas they have about creating the conditions for all students to succeed
* To introduce how we are operationalizing equity because it is critical for student well-being and achievement
* For school teams to learn how to lead a conversation about what is happening in their school to gather data that will establish baseline on equity for every school

A group of approximately 110 people gathered at Oakdale Park Middle School.

Liz Rykert (Facilitator, Meta Strategies) introduced the evening and led a land acknowledgement, also touching on the history of Indigenous peoples on this land and their ongoing presence going forward.

Trustees Ford and Lulka were invited to share welcoming remarks to the group. Liz then provided a quick overview of the meeting’s purpose, situating these Ward Forums as part of the larger work of the Enhancing Equity Task Force: to figure out what is holding us back from doing what we know we need to do.

Forum participants were invited into an impromptu networking exercise, where people rapidly shared challenges and expectations with each other and made new connections. People were invited to reflect on and talk about:

*“What are some of the challenges preventing student wellbeing and achievement at my school?”*

*“What do I hope to contribute to and get from and contribute to the session tonight?”*

The conversation was rich and lively, surfacing a range of ideas and thoughts:

* Seeing this as an opportunity to be in an open, accepting environment to discuss the many racial issues and tensions going on right now, and also to realize some of my own biases
* The challenges of getting the resources, technology, and tools to provide all students with 21st century learning, and the expertise necessary to support this
* Getting to a point where students are not held back by financial issues, personal issues, self-image and confidence; supporting the wellbeing of our students
* Changing the way we have brave conversations so that the focus is on the issues, rather than infighting between people – especially those who may not want to have these discussions
* Coming up with strategies to involve parents more in the school

Jeewan Chanicka (Central Co-ordinating Principal of Equity and Achievement) then provided some brief background on the vital importance of this work within the TDSB. He noted how sometimes, while trying to have courageous conversations, people don’t actually name what they will talk about. He acknowledged how the TDSB has not done well supporting LGBTQ+ students, those needing Special Education, coming from low socio-economic status, and the challenges the Board faces around anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism.

He displayed a slide depicting the ideas of Equality, Equity, and Liberation for the group to discuss amongst themselves. A forum participant raised that in order to analyze this image, there must be focus on power and privilege. They noted that though liberation is desirable, someone still had the power to decide that the wall be removed, and that the image reflects some of the systemic pieces that hold things in place. Someone else added on that even the very definition of what the obstacle is can be problematic, because everyone will have a different experience of that. The very questions of who decides what the obstacles are and how to move them also confront this tension. Another person noted how they interpreted equity as being a band-aid solution to systemic issues, and liberation as being about breaking those down and rebuilding together. Finally, it was noted that the elephant on the table in this image is actually the fence; so instead of focusing on accommodations, we must work together to get to the heart of the problem.

Jeewan emphasized how we must make sure that the right supports are in place until we can get to a place where we’re able to break down the best, and that it must be our goal to do that together. We must focus on facing this together rather than falling into infighting over issues. He noted how human rights is not like a pie; it is not a zero-sum game. He gave an example of how TTC stop announcements were implemented for a small group of the population, but in fact benefit everybody; equity work is the same. He acknowledged how the TDSB cannot continue doing what has always been done while expecting different results, and the need to dismantle some structures that may hold these patterns in place. He noted that the TDSB cannot continue to consult; it is clear that people have spoken. Rather than asking people for their patience, the TDSB is asking people for their support and continual input. He provided quotes by Carl James and Paul Gorski about the barriers of racism and classism, noting how these challenges aren’t just a TDSB issue, but rather an issue of education.

In Tanya’s absence, Jeewan also presented on Indigenous education and history, acknowledging the learnings and guidance he has received from TDSB Elder Dr. Duke Redbird in his work. He emphasized how the realities for Indigenous people continue to be challenging and distinct, noting for example how many Indigenous communities in Canada continue to live without access to clean drinking water. He also acknowledged the pain and trauma caused by the many missing and murdered Indigenous women. Within this context, only about 1,000 (0.3%) of the approximately 240, 000 Indigenous students in Toronto self-identify in the TDSB. He noted how there are many complex challenges around self-identification, especially as it was used in the past to destroy families and identities, leading to Indigenous students often hiding in plain view.

He then emphasized the importance of creating safe cultural contexts together, especially given the diverse, complicated, and often mixed identities of Indigenous students. He pointed to some specific points from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action for Canada that relate to education. He also pointed to a number of other recommendations and actions from the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and recently two significant TDSB motions regarding Indigenous education: the land acknowledgement recognizing the enduring presence of Aboriginal peoples, and the development of curriculum resources that educate on reconciliation and treaties.

Liz expressed how the TDSB is really raising the bar now on its commitment to action with this Task Force. She noted how unlike many other school boards in the province, the TDSB is a leader in collecting race-based data. She shared how in earlier days of the Task Force, a number of people raised that we could not go back out and ask people how the Board is doing on equity again; this would prove the Board was not really listening. The issues and challenges are clear, so the focus has shifted to question what is keeping us from making progress and inviting as many people into the process as possible.

The group was then invited to form small conversations in their school groups to discuss the conditions for wellbeing and achievement in their specific school. People were invited to consider seven broad areas: Classroom Climate and Instruction, School Climate, Student Voice and Space, Family/Caregiver-School Relations, School Leadership, Community Connections, and Culture of Professional Development. These seven areas were adapted from OISE’s *Equity Continuum: Action for Critical Transformation in Schools and Classrooms.*

Groups, which comprised of administrators, educators, parents, teachers, and community members, were invited to consider what things are already in place at their school, and ideas that could be implemented after this meeting that would improve conditions for everyone. A handout was provided for participants to write their ideas down together. Two colours of post-it notes were provided to record individual ideas; yellow for things happening now, and blue for ideas for the future. These post-it notes were then put up onto large flipchart paper, based on the seven categories. The conversation, energy, and activity across the group was rich and lively.

Liz then shared a Feedback Form tool developed by the TDSB to support every school in having these conversations across different stakeholder groups (administrators, educators, parents, students, and community organizations/partners). Although this is not compulsory, the hope is that each of the 580 schools participates. Results from these Feedback Forms would allow the Task Force to hear from each school, help establish a baseline to guide future work and track progress, and identify localized strategies to improve student wellbeing and achievement to act on. The data would also help inform the recommendations formed by the Task Force over the summer, which would be brought back to the community in a Fall round of Ward Forums to get feedback on.

She then provided some logistical details about the Feedback Form. Each stakeholder group would submit one Feedback Form, so each school would produce up to five submissions. They would be submitted online. Each stakeholder group would assign a Team Lead, and work together to find a collective voice to report on the Form. She noted that the Task Force will provide tips on how to convene conversations. The questions are modelled off the seven areas discussed at this meeting. She drew attention to a Comment Box at the bottom of the Form, which would allow for nuance and context to be added. For example, if it was difficult to reach an agreement on a particular question, or it was difficult to get feedback from specific groups of people, this could be noted in the Comment Box.

It was emphasized that the Feedback Form would be used as an aid to facilitate discussions at each school, and is not an evaluation. The baseline information established at each school would, in many ways, serve to tell the story of each school. Team Leads would assume responsibility over convening and engaging with people who may not typically participate in these conversations. It was noted that the Task Force will be circulating tips and strategies on how to convene, facilitate the conversations, and also with specific instructions on the process. The final Feedback Form will also be circulated at that time, after incorporating feedback from all Ward Forums. This will be sent out at the beginning of June to Principals. It was raised that anti-Semitism should be added to Item three under the section “School Climate”.

The group was invited to review the Feedback Form together to see if any questions or comments came up. It was noted Google Forms could be a great platform for collecting the Feedback Form, but Liz noted that the hope was for people to convene in person to have conversations. This is especially important as not everyone may agree, and one of the goals here is to hear and learn from different experiences. Someone else noted that even though we are engaging different stakeholders and some would feel brave enough to speak up, many others may feel more fearful to add their voices. It was expressed that we must engage people in different ways, because this work is not just about checking off boxes; it’s about saving lives. It was raised that the Feedback Form should be provided in different languages. Someone raised that in order for this work to happen, the lens of equity should be applied from the get-go. Someone gave the example of the growing Turkish population at their school, but the lack of resources on translation services as Turkish is not a language traditionally offered by the TDSB.

Summary of collected feedback:

* Add anti-Semitism to Item 3 under the section “School Climate”
* Provide Feedback Form in different languages

**Summary of ideas generated in response to the question: What ideas do you have to create the conditions for well-being and achievement for every student?**

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| Classroom Climate and Instruction  Ideas already doing:   * Using technology and relevant material to meet the needs of each student in classroom instruction * mindfulness and yoga - focus on self-regulation * library books that reflect the student body (Highview P.S/Tumpane) * honouring home languages of students and allowing students to bring themselves into the classroom * instituted PLC's to move forward culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy * pedagogy/ inquiry based learning - draw in examples that students can relate to (W.L Mackenzie) * students demonstrating respect and acceptance, not tolerance (OPMS) * students using social media to communicate to parents and the wider community * students see themselves visually throughout the school/curriculum * inclusive classrooms - eliminated HSP (Congregated) (Elia M.S) * reading buddies (Highview P.S/Tumpane)   Ideas to consider:   * high expectations for all students * promoting different cultural languages (Chalkfarm P.S) * students can't move around- we need more rooms/less students per class (OPMS) * dual books (Chalkfarm P.S) * create cultural extravaganza - not a "token" social justice perspective * student surveys/interviews to gather info on school experiences * involve students in choices * actions over words (Highview P.S/ Tumpane) * increase variety of courses |
| School Climate  Ideas already doing:   * well-being section in library * playing together integration between grades, genders (Highview P.S/ Tumpane) * beanbags and Lego in library, "green screen" * mindfulness to help self-regulation (Topcliff) * need to work together-teachers, parents, and support staff (OPMS) * safe, welcoming and inclusive environment * self-advocacy encouraged and supported   Ideas to consider:   * ensure water is available at all times (OPMS) * more family nights - Math, Language, Movie night * examination of biases on the part of educators that may lead to barriers * after- school program for help in English, Math (Emery C.I) * improve safety- ability to search for unsafe items (OPMS) * opportunities for real talk amongst staff (OPMS) * connecting students with a trustful (caring) adult * learning conversation protocol/listening protocol * more risk-taking and reflection * more P.D on how to address issues * high expectations for students- always keep raising the bar * provide access to extracurricular and enhanced arts, cultural, sports * put a price cap on field trips * diversify activities- less formal dances, more game nights and affordable events |
| Student Voice and Space  Ideas already doing:   * school student council validates student voice * student council helpers (Highview P.S/Tumpane) * self-advocacy * future aces (Topcliff) * "Me to We" - Y to Y * student voice forum with trustee- action oriented * creating safe environment for student voice in class- variety of strategies to hear ideas from all students ex. tablets, Google classroom discussions, paper snowball ideas ( W.L Mackenzie C.I)   Ideas to consider:   * include student voice in class climate, instruction and assessment (Topcliff) * a phone number that students can call to address issues (OPMS) * extra time for students to come by to talk to admin/teachers (OPMS) * get real student voice (authentic) (Faywood) * celebrations in the building (Chalkfarm P.S) * twitter * positive space (Highview P.S /Tumpane) * student issue drop box (OPMS) * create student success pathways * build an open and trusting environment for all * mentorship- learn from each other * create a space for student accomplishments to be acknowledged * listen * treat mental health issues as important, and act on them * student helpers with announcements, school administration |
| Family/Caregiver School Relations  Ideas already doing:   * parent chosen workshops e.g. ASL Family Reunification (Faywood ABC) * increased parent involvement in the school * good news/ sunshine news calls * building relationships between parents and students   Ideas to consider:   * parent workshops on 2a program and post-secondary pathways- remove barriers (Emery C.I) * more "well-being" focused activities * parents teaching others/sharing skills (OPMS) * having parents come in and doing workshops and sharing expertise (Chalkfarm P.S) * community space (OPMS) * staff mentorship program for disengaged staff * parents reaching out * grants for information sessions for parents on strategies being used at school that could be transferred to home * Smart TV to broadcast public service announcements featuring the students (Driftwood P.S) * enjoying being a family in the school   common area electronic display to keep everyone in the know- announcements, events |
| School Leadership  Ideas already doing:   * positive space club * right to play * peer mediators * Eco schools * announcers * equity committee * recognition awards- strength based * student success mentorship program * admin set high expectations and accountability * voices are heard and actions are taken * reciprocal learning for all   Ideas to consider:   * cultural sensitivity training * student leadership- future aces, student council * professional development on how to address issues * streamline interpreters * older grades helping younger grades * mainstream classes helping special needs classed (Highview P.S /Tumpane) |
| Community Connections  Ideas already doing:   * family Math night/ curriculum night (Topcliff) * Kindergarten orientation * community BBQ * invite community groups to staff meetings to speak about services (OPMS) * using the parent engagement centre as a way to engage and collaborate with parents * partner with Parks and Rec to work with students (OPMS)   Ideas to consider:   * make better use of parent/community volunteers-be more intentional and organized * connect more with community agencies to support students (OPMS) * more parent involvement needed (Community Connections) (Highview P.S/Tumpane) * parent interviews and surveys to gather more data regarding experiences within our school * fundraising for all schools * day of peace- community day empowering and engaging community partners |
| Culture of Professional Development  Ideas already doing:   * buy locally * well-being activities for families * Parks and Recreation * Delta * Karate * open mind concepts - we are all co-learners (Highview P.S/ Tumpane) * too much learning - out too much- not enough time to use (OPMS) * support teaching initiatives (OPMS) * professional learning focused on equity   Ideas to consider:   * building capacity * incorporating students into PD (WCSS) * more staff based on barriers, need * equity walks (Chalkfarm P.S) * go beyond the classroom to learn from others and come back to share * provide opportunities to visit classrooms within our own schools * provide teachers with P.D on mental health issues * follow-up after the P.D, to build capacity in the school climate |