

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

Ward Forum 4: Trustee Chadwick, Trustee Kandavel

Date: May 8, 2017

Time: 6:30 - 8:30pm

Location: 140 Borough Drive, Rooms 1/2

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 120 people gathered at 140 Borough Drive.

Liz Rykert (Facilitator, Meta Strategies) introduced the evening, welcoming Tanya Senk (Central Coordinating Vice-Principal, Aboriginal Education) to lead a land acknowledgement to open the evening, also touching on the history of Indigenous peoples on this land and their ongoing presence going forward.

Trustee Chadwick and Trustee Kandavel were invited to share welcoming remarks to the group. Liz then provided a quick overview of the meeting’s purpose.

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:

* Equipping educators to have courageous conversations about their biases and struggles, to confront the issues we see and avoid brushing them under the carpet
* A student teacher shared an initiative they implemented at their school called a Self-Regulation Board
  + Students use different emojis and colours to get in touch with and express their feelings
  + A chart was created providing guidance on how to navigate emotions
  + Students also bring strategies of self-regulation home to communicate with their parents
* A student shared students’ desire to contribute to dialogue on important issues, especially with what is happening globally right now
  + There is currently a lack of spaces to do so
  + They shared their school’s Equity Council, which consists of 85 students who take on 1 of 5 issues: Race & Religion, LGBTQ+, Exceptionalities, Body Image, and Gender
  + The Equity Council takes on activities, has kiosks and booths, and time at assemblies to talk about important issues, making the whole school more aware and creating a safer environment
  + This idea could be adapted by other schools
* In Alberta, a collaborative approach to examine the physical spaces in their school was taken so that their environment was conducive for wellbeing, achievement, and growth
  + One primary concern for students was the state of restroom facilities; it became apparent that students felt a day was successful if they didn’t have to visit the restroom
  + The approach to this conversation resulted in a strong sense of belonging and community as it allowed for people to contribute to finding a solution to this problem
* A strong need to look at the needs of special education students to break the cycle of what jobs and outcomes are expected for them was expressed
* It was noted that many students and their abilities are viewed according to their socio-economic status, background, or where they live

Jim Spyropoulos (Executive Superintendent, Engagement and Well-being) then provided some brief background on the vital importance of this work within the TDSB. He began by expressing that although we can feel proud of what we have been able to do so far, the main reason we’re still here today is because there is still work to do. Equity must permeate every department and every person in the system, rather than be a single committee or department. He highlighted some patterns that are deeply disturbing, such as the effects of being placed in Applied verses Academic streams of learning or biases being applied to people based on where they live. He provided the example of CW Jefferys CI, who dismantled their streamed courses by supporting an opt-in option for their students. What they found was many students were doing better in their Academic classes than they were in their Applied classes.

He emphasized the need to place difficult issues on the table, drawing attention to a recent report on student expulsion looking at anti-Black racism. He noted how if 12% of the student population is Black, yet 50% of students being expelled are Black, then there is a trend and gap present that must be dismantled. He also emphasized the relationship between these issues and mental well-being. He drew attention to the alarming rate of suicide amongst students and the vital importance of understanding the real, human outcomes of what we’re talking about when we say equity, achievement, and well-being.

Tanya Senk then provided some history and background on Aboriginal Education, emphasizing how First Nations, Inuit, and Metis students all attend TDSB schools. She shared how she often didn’t see herself represented in her school curriculum, and how when she did it would be a misrepresentation. She invited the group to have a brief conversation about what they know about Indigenous education. A student shared how, although there is much room for improvement, they felt that their school was taking good steps by discussing residential schools and colonialism in their classrooms, standing for a daily land acknowledgement, and learning about Indigenous authors.

Tanya then drew attention to the historical and contemporary erasure of Indigenous peoples due to colonization. A Toronto Aboriginal Research Project in 2011 demonstrated that Toronto has the highest population of those three groups in all of Ontario combined. Tanya explained the idea of being hidden in plain view, and the challenge of self-identification amidst deeply entrenched colonialism and institutionalized racism against Indigenous peoples. Of approximately 240,000 Indigenous students in Toronto, it is estimated that only about 1,000 (0.3%) self-identify as Indigenous.

She further emphasized the importance of creating safe cultural contexts together, especially given the diverse, complicated, and often mixed identities of Indigenous students. She called attention to the Aboriginal Education Centre and its role in addressing the knowledge and achievement gaps we see, and to the fact that not only were Indigenous children denied the truth of their identities, histories, languages, spirituality and cultures, but other students were also denied the truth of these as well.

Tanya then pointed to some specific points from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action for Canada that relate to education. She 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.

She closed by noting the importance of honouring and talking about the significance of Indigenous knowledge, especially in the year of Canada 150. The erasure and disenfranchisement endured by Indigenous peoples was, as Senator Murray Sinclair said, made possible through the use of education as the primary tool of education. Now, barely 60 years after Indigenous peoples were granted the right to vote in 1960, education must be used as the key for reconciliation. Canada’s Indigenous peoples cannot be positioned as the pitiful Other. Rather, we must work to highlight the achievements and contributions of Indigenous knowledge to Canada.

The group was then invited to form small conversations separated by school 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, 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; pink for things happening now, and green for ideas for the future. These post-it notes were then put up onto large flipchart paper, based on the seven categories. A summary of these ideas appears below.

The conversation, energy, and activity across the group was rich, generating many ideas during the activity. Participants were then asked to share any reflections or ideas that they came up with during the session. Some highlights included:

* A courageous conversation took place for a school team – the process allowed them to be honest with themselves and how things are happening at their school, which was described as liberating
* It was surfaced that often, older students will refrain from opening up to their peers in schools despite encouragement and spaces to do so
  + A student who is the VP of their Student Body shared how in this discussion, parents shared things that their children have shared but have not been shared with their student peers in the school
  + Putting things on the table was described as a positive experience

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 participate. 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 clarified that the Feedback Form would seek student participation from Grades 5 and up.

Some ideas that the group shared on how to implement this process in their school were:

* Leveraging existing events happening at their school, like a Math Night, to convene a conversation with parents attending this event
* A student shared doing an Equity Walkthrough with their school in the past, which students from different backgrounds, academic levels, and cultures participated in; a similar approach could be used for this process

A concern was raised over how to effectively gather input from disenfranchised or typically silenced or marginalized groups. Strategies to bring together people for face-to-face will have to be found, and any strategies or tips emerging from other Ward Forums will be shared with the group. The Task Force will also be pursuing other strategies to engage with students and parents, such as working with groups like Parent Academies, Community Support Workers, and Student Equity Program Advisors to convene sessions like tonight for those who were unable to make it. Strategies and ways of working are being iterated and adjusted as things move forward to be flexible and adaptive to challenges as they emerge.

**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 in place:   * going deeper- teacher knowledge curriculum and strategies (G.B Little) * parents council * math * language * restorative practice * establish equity, achievement and wellbeing goals that we are working on * common prep times and co-teaching within grade teams (Corvette Fr. P.S) * sensory room- positive space for students to take a break from stimulation and stress * going deeper with strategies with parent knowledge * celebrate significant days * zones of regulation * roots of empathy (Oakridge) * student inquiry * work with equity department for gathering student voice around lowered expectations (Halbert) * resource audit (focus on dual language, indigenous literature) (William G. Davis) * utilizing EA across school to support students across school in classroom (William G. Davis) * thoughtful class placements (Willow Park) * student voice guiding instruction (authentic) (Willow Park) * inclusion/differences- walk/talks (Halbert)   Ideas being considered:   * update history textbooks to reflect new curriculum realities * have a discussion about specific data in the towards race equity in education report (Halbert) * students are not reflected enough in the curriculum instructions * whole school collaboration (Corvette J.P.S) * more indigenous authors in school, in general (R.H King Academy) * buddy bench (Oakridge) * prepare classrooms for all types of learners for differentiation and MI's * welcoming committee to greet students who are late so they don't feel guilty * technology in the hands of every students * focus on positive as well as negative statistics in History and Geography (R.H. King) * more outdoor education away from the school (Halbert) * getting all grades involved in student council activities * visuals- zones of reg., every class have a visual schedule for students who need it |
| School Climate  Ideas already in place:   * positive area space * set a positive and safe tone * open door policy * safe and caring adults in the building * make students feel connected * school beautification * Better than Mirrors * Breakfast program * Y.E.S * Boys and Girls Clubs * United Cultures Club * Bake Sales * Buyouts * equity learning walk * teacher-student-admin relationships * right to play * greeting each child * activities based on student suggestions (J.A.L) * school safety and monitors * staff reflecting the student body * trans day of remembrance * co-curricular audit to provide activities all students can participate in * integrated HSP Spec. Ed. model * wellness committee (Anxiety/Brave Starts Here) * breakfast program * equity walk and feedback * student and staff PD focus group * acknowledgment in the morning addressing aboriginal people * NACIO art course * in- school extracurricular etc. that highlight student success * offer clothing to keep students warm/dry if they don't have it   Ideas being considered:   * school equity council * staff need to reach out and make connections with students who have difficulty forming relationships * more community outreach (Corvette Dr.) * have courageous conversations * more feel-good fun stuff * facilitating meetings/ P.D that have open conversations about bias * recognize everyone's voice |
| Student Voice and Space  Ideas already in place:   * student equity walk (W.G. Davis) * student representatives (Corvette Dr.) * spirit week assembly * kiosks regarding equity issues (R.H King) * establish strong student leadership team * video or presentations * student led black history month * activities throughout month led by students (Birchmount Park) * understanding/revealing bias- PD with staff, student workshop * we know our students- they are all our students * focus groups/read aloud (Anson Park) * hope for future bulletin board * roots of empathy * anxiety/bravery wall * student leadership councils regarding student wellness- me to we * student inquiry- Boys to leaders/Girls Club (Oakridge) * student run equity group, "Color Me Truth" (Laurier C.I) * student advocacy talks * participation in LC3 "Speak Up" forum (Laurier C.I)   Ideas being considered:   * transportation accessibility (wheelchairs) * "chill out" spaces in all classrooms (Corvette Dr./ Anson Park) * safe, positive spaces for students and staff (Oakridge) * Monday morning assemblies run by students * student council * more boys/cultures in equity * ask others to come up with new ideas * talk about things others are interested in * before and after school programming * PFLC (J.A.L) * bring other schools for sports events and play days, etc * kilometer club - run laps, and get a popsicle stick for each lap run (J.A.L) * windows and mirrors on the first day of class (Birchmount) * student advisory council * school ambassadors from every class K-6 (W.G Davis) |
| Family/Caregiver School Relations  Ideas already in place:   * Passion projects * giving students a chance to learn about something they're passionate about (J.A.L) * student voice * parent voice * leverage tech to engage parents * Friday file * music * art * gym * passion projects * learning buddies (J.A.L) * tea and talk with parents- grove and space (J.A.L) * leverage community advocate to assist the lates (Halbert) * walk to school with your principal Wednesdays (Halbert) * language support (Laurier C.I) * prayer space * use PFLC to build community relationships ( H.A Halbert) * supportive phone calls celebrating successes for at risk students (Willow Park) * weekly parent e-mails * learning buddies * older students communicating with younger students (J.A.L)   Ideas being considered:   * inviting parents to be involved in their child's education * engage our black community systemically * more inclusive opportunities to invite families in the learning e.g. celebrating Canada with Open House activities (Willows Park) * use parent protocol more effectively to create an accountable and responsive school (Halbert) * staff and family retreat weekend (Halbert) * school community consultation (J.A.L) * take back to parent's self reflection piece- for example have sessions for our school similar to the equity forum (Cedar Drive) * talk to students about character * teach respect in partnership with parents * have all parents participate in school activities (J.A.L) |
| School Leadership  Ideas already in place:   * student run equity workshops with feeder schools and within Laurier (Laurier C.I) * many co-councilor opportunities to engage all * shared/generated by students * leadership course for Gr. 11 students * growth mindset with leadership team- reading Dweck's book and discussions (Birchmount) * equity teacher PLC group (Laurier C.I) * distributed leadership * parent council led school foci * staff members recite treaty acknowledgement (Laurier C.I) * having intentional conversations about access and climate in staff members * student wellness group * student council - bringing student voice out through leadership   Ideas being considered:   * sports work-shop * all grades * building leadership from a young age * additional professional support services staff to meet real need |
| Community Connections  Ideas already in place:   * boys to leaders * girls club * equity team * wellness committee (Oakridge) * PD- community connections, Aisling, V Village, Scar. Gen. Hosp., school common (the hub) (Oakridge) * outdoor education * set up welcoming family environment * meet kids on the bus to greet them to our centre * more contact with parents and community groups to set up student success * different cultures and languages represented around school and in books * tea and talk * bring in Indigenous professional speakers (Lawyers, etc) (R.H. King) * youth link (Laurier C.I) * wall of personal stories from staff, students, parents, community members * Native learning centre east (Laurier C.I) * community partnerships strategically made * use parent council to re-engage a community not being represented- parent council to meet in their own community space (Halbert) * community wellness nights planned by CSW and parents (Halbert) * community communication- twitter, voice call out, newsletters (Oakridge)   Ideas being considered:   * parent equity walk 2017-2018 (W.G Davis) * inquiry based and project based learning tasks that are linked to real-life problems. (Birchmount) * Muslim welfare centers- community feast with community partners (Halbert) * re-establish community connections * engaging parents in middle-school * partner engagement plan/rally- all engaged in planning activity for next year (Halbert) * every classroom should have a parent connect leader (Oakridge) |
| Culture of Professional Development  Ideas already in place:   * Kairos Blanket activities with staff and students (Laurier C.I) * Indigenous cultural instructor sharing with staff and students (Laurier C.I) * monthly PLC's * LSIP equity meeting (R.H King) * engage staff learning around gender-GBV team training * gender neutral washrooms (Halbert) * literacy PD * cross curricular- purchase new culturally diverse books for History and English * equity professional learning * having teachers recognize their own experiences and have that impact how they teach, with support from equity leaders * teacher/student equity walks * conversations on equity have staff uncomfortable and reflective (W.G Davis)   Ideas being considered:   * anti-racism education for staff * modifications/accommodations still need to be made better * respecting students IEP's and their potentials * build zones of regulation into school culture (Oakridge) * Indigenous Education - focus on sacred teachings (Warden) |