

Name of Committee: Equity Policy Community Advisory Committee (EPCAC)

Meeting Date: March 24, 2025

A meeting of the Equity Policy Community Advisory Committee convened on Monday, March 24, 2025, from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. with Co-Chair Jean-Paul Ngana presiding. This meeting was held via Zoom.

Attendance (via Zoom):

Members:

Jean Paul Ngana (Co-Chair, Parent), Michelle Aarts (Trustee Co-Chair), Neethan Shan (TDSB Trustee), Joella Connaught (Parent), Janina Cherkewich (Parent), Sophia Ruddock (Parent), Charlene Dunstan (Parent), Sharon Beason (parent)

Eleanor Yang CCNCTC

Staff Resource Persons: Marwa Hamid (Superintendent of Education – Family of Schools 22), Cheryl Nambiar (Administrative Liaison Family of Schools 22)

Non-Members:

Trustee Dennis Hastings
Trustee Deborah Williams
Derick Chica
Maxine S
Eva M

Guest: Seema Matlib (Human Rights Office – TDSB)

Regrets:

Michael Kerr – Colour of Poverty, Colour of Change



Community Advisory Committees

ITEM	DISCUSSION	RECOMMENDATIONS / MOTIONS
1. Call to Order / Quorum / Reading of Meeting Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting called to order at 6:36 p.m. <p>At a committee meeting, all EPCAC members shall:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adhere to the established process. Listen to each other with an open mind and without interruption, to gain better understanding and clarity of the issues at hand; Remain civil and respectful of each other. Refrain from making any negative or disparaging statement against another member; and state opinions and respond to others within the agreed upon time limit for a topic. <p><u>Quorum</u></p>	
2. Land Acknowledgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The meeting began with a Land Acknowledgment 	
3. Declarations of Possible Conflict of Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> None 	
4. Approval of Agenda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved, without comment 	
5. Approval of February 24, 2025 Minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved, without comment 	
6. Matters Arising from Previous Meeting Minutes	<p><i>Auditor General's Report</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Trustee Aarts: Report shared at this meeting</i> <p><i>Transportation Report</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The transportation team will attend in April.</i> <i>Members are asked to send any questions regarding transportation to Cheryl before the March meeting, so the team can be prepared for the discussion.</i> 	

<p>7. Human Rights Office Presentation – Seema Matlib</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission: The Human Rights Office's goal is to create a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning and work environment that upholds human rights and promotes equity across the organization. • Policies and Procedures: The office operates under key policies, including P31 and P013, which specifically address human rights and workplace harassment. These policies are designed to ensure a clear framework for addressing issues related to discrimination and harassment within the TDSB. • Key Functions and Initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The office is committed to fostering a culture of understanding, focusing on early resolution of issues to prevent conflicts from escalating. ○ The restorative practices approach is central to the office's conflict resolution strategy. This method emphasizes repairing harm, restoring relationships, and promoting mutual understanding. ○ The office offers training initiatives for staff to help them develop the skills necessary to effectively address and manage human rights issues. ○ The office's efforts are directly aligned with the TDSB's strategic plan and the calls to action, contributing to the creation of an equitable environment that respects diversity and promotes inclusion. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question <i>"Is there a specific checkbox for reporting anti-Palestinian racism within the Human Rights Office (HRO)?"</i> 	

	<p>Response HRO staff noted the importance of including such a checkbox and assured Derek that she would take the suggestion back to the office for consideration, aiming to address this gap in reporting mechanisms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question: <i>"How does the Human Rights Office handle discrimination cases that do not fall under specific grounds like race or religion?"</i> <p>Response: HRO staff emphasized the case-by-case approach adopted by the office. Each case is treated individually, taking into account the unique circumstances. The focus is on promoting a respectful and non-discriminatory environment, and the office works to resolve issues irrespective of the specific grounds of discrimination.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question <i>"Can you explain the process for addressing complaints, and what role does the Human Rights Office play in investigations?"</i> <p>Response: HRO staff provided an overview of the complaint investigation process. She emphasized that the office works proactively to address issues at an early stage, which helps prevent escalation into more significant problems. Investigations are conducted thoroughly, ensuring that all relevant information is considered before a resolution is reached.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The office is focused on early intervention and emphasizes the importance of clear policies and procedures to handle various forms of discrimination. 	

This includes ensuring the policies remain adaptive and responsive to emerging needs and concerns.

- HRO staff mentioned the potential for policy updates based on feedback from staff, students, and the community. Continuous improvement is a key priority for the office.

Question:

"What impact will the Ontario Human Rights Commission's action plan on systemic anti-Black racism have on the TDSB?"

Response

HRO rep acknowledged the action plan's importance and highlighted that the TDSB is committed to aligning its operations with the plan. She emphasized that the office would continue to focus on continuous improvement to ensure that anti-Black racism is effectively addressed within the school board's policies and practices.

- **Question**

"What can be done about the broader sector's hesitancy to discuss human rights issues, and how can the TDSB be more proactive in addressing these matters?"

Response:

HRO rep recognized the challenge of addressing human rights issues in broader sectors but reaffirmed the TDSB's commitment to being proactive. She stressed the importance of open dialogues, awareness-raising, and ensuring that staff and students are equipped with the tools and resources to engage with human rights matters.

How does HRO work with the Equity Department to meet their respective mandate that may at time overlap?

Response:

	<p>The HRO representative suggested that the two offices each achieve their objectives as related to their mandate and collaborate as needed.</p> <p>Trustee Aarts emphasized the legal duty of school boards to create proactive spaces for all students. This includes addressing anti-DEI rhetoric and ensuring that all students have access to a safe learning environment where diversity and inclusion are prioritized. Trustee Aarts highlighted that creating such spaces is not only a legal obligation but a moral imperative.</p>	
	<p>Conclusion</p> <p>The Human Rights Office remains committed to fostering an inclusive, respectful environment for all students and staff. By continually improving policies, procedures, and training, the office aims to ensure that discrimination and harassment are addressed effectively. The ongoing dialogue with the community and responsiveness to feedback are central to the office's work in promoting human rights and equity within the TDSB.</p>	
	<p>Action: the HRO Representative committed to come back for a follow up meeting, including to provide answers to some of the questions discussed.</p>	

<p>8. Trustee updates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A finance meeting is scheduled for Wednesday to discuss budget-related matters. Before the March break, the Board passed the first stage of the budget process. • The first stage of the budget process focuses on enrollment-based staffing. • Staff analyze various data points including Census data, city population figures, and current registration numbers from Immigration Canada. Using this data, predictions are made about the number of students expected in September. These predictions are typically accurate, often within a few hundred students each year. • These enrollment predictions play a critical role as they determine the base funding from the Ministry of Education. • In February/March, staff present the base staffing levels, focusing on positions funded by the Ministry on a per-student basis. These decisions are not made by the Board but rather reflect the Ministry's allocations for staffing. • This process is done early in the year so that by the March break, schools can be informed about the staffing levels for the upcoming year. Principals and staffing teams can then determine the number of classes, grade combinations, and offer jobs for the fall. <p>Trustee Role in Budget Decisions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trustees have the opportunity to provide input on programming needs within the budget. This is a time when trustees must pay close attention to budget details as the discussions evolve. • The province is expected to announce funding in April. At this stage, the Board will determine how it wants to allocate funding for its various priorities. 	
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- The vast majority of the budget is dedicated to staffing.
- Trustees encourage members to engage in these discussions. If members would like to have finance staff present at a meeting, this would be an ideal time to request it.

Equity Concerns & Budget Cuts

- **Question** *"When funding gets cut, equity is often one of the first areas to be negatively impacted. Marginalized and oppressed communities are often the hardest hit. Is there any discussion about how parents can organize to push back?"*
- **Response:**
 - Different trustees have varied perspectives on the funding needs of the education system. While some believe that the system is adequately funded, the majority feel that funding is insufficient.
 - The Board is currently gathering information, and the provincial organization is drafting reports about the **deficits** faced by boards.
 - **The Ford government** tends to be more responsive to community advocacy than to organizations, so it is crucial for parents to get involved in the conversation.

Deficit & Provincial Oversight

- Key concerns include the fact that **53 school boards** are currently in deficit.
 - Boards are allowed to run a **deficit of up to 1%**, but the TDSB is at a **2% deficit**, which is a challenging position for the Board to be in.
 - In **2019**, the province cut **\$1 billion** from K-12 education funding. Additionally, the funding model

changed by rolling childcare into the education portfolio. This reduced the overall funding for K-12 education, even though the province claimed to be spending more.

- Between **2019–2023**, there were labor strikes, work-to-rule actions, and pandemic-related funding which helped stabilize the situation. However, that funding has now ended, and the system has no reserves left.
- The TDSB is currently facing a **\$120 million deficit**, and last year, the province **cut \$95 million** without input from the Boards. These cuts have affected equity funding.
- If trustees refuse to approve the budget, the province could intervene and take control, therefore trustees really have no say.

- **Flexibility in Funding:**

- In the past, the Board utilized flexible funds (e.g., Indigenous funding) to meet community needs. However, these flexible funds have now been exhausted.
- TDSB has several flexible funding categories, such as **(LOI)**, but these options are quickly running out.

- **Finance Staff Meeting Request:**

- If members want to discuss the budget in more detail, particularly in relation to equity and the funding impacts, they can request **finance staff** to present at a future meeting.
- **Action:** SR member is tasked with reaching out to Craig Snider to request a finance staff member to attend the next EPCAC meeting.

	<p>Auditor General Report</p> <p>Trustee Aarts shared a link to the Auditor General’s report, which includes responses from both TDSB and the Ministry. This report can serve as a discussion point for committee members.</p> <p>https://www.auditor.on.ca/en/content/annualreports/audits/en2024/AR-PA_TDSB_en24.html</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Findings from the Auditor General’s Report: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The rate of violent incidents in TDSB schools is lower than the provincial average, but it is at its highest level ever. ○ There is a discrepancy between the central tracking data on bullying and the responses from student safety surveys. The Auditor General pointed out that the data does not align, suggesting that incidents of bullying meeting thresholds may not align with students’ perceptions of safety. ○ The criminal background checks for staff are not consistently conducted. The Ministry has not provided guidelines or funding to ensure that all staff undergo these checks, leaving gaps in safety protocols. The Auditor General has set a timeline for the Ministry to address these issues. ○ Special Education Review: Trustee Aarts requested that the Auditor General also review Special Education funding and policies. • Question: <i>"Are there any recommendations or expectations from the school board?"</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Response: Yes, each section of the Auditor General's report includes a response from staff. The Auditor General does not simply publish their findings but 	
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engages in dialogue with the staff to ensure their findings are understood and acted upon.

- **Question:** *"Members will be interested in the equity perspective and how the Board has acted on the Auditor General's expectations. Can Jim S. from Safe and Caring Schools share insights?"*
- **Response:** Jim S. will be able to provide insights during the Caring and Safe Schools report, which will be released in May/June. At that time, he can speak to the findings related to student safety.

Upcoming Budget Discussions & Delegations


<https://www.tdsb.on.ca/About-Us/Business-Services/Budgets-and-Financial-Statements/The-TDSB-Budget>

- **April 29:** Public delegations will be held on the budget. This is an opportunity for individuals to present their views.
- **Question:** *"When an individual goes to the Board, it is called a delegation, but when a committee goes, it is called a report. Is that correct?"*
 - **Response:** Yes, delegations are made by individuals, and the committee can submit a formal report rather than a delegation. This report can be presented at the meeting by the co-chair on behalf of the committee.
 - Trustees will have separate meetings where delegations are heard, particularly for budget discussions, as these meetings tend to draw significant public interest. A report on the budget will be made available in advance, and delegates can sign up ahead of time to present.

- **Question:** *"Can EPCAC submit a report to the Board about budget recommendations?"*
 - **Response:** Yes, the committee can submit a **motion or report** to the Board, but this must be discussed and passed in an official meeting. The chairs can present this report once it's finalized.
- The next EPCAC meeting aligns with the **April 28-29** delegation sessions, which will be dedicated to hearing delegations on the budget. It would be helpful for EPCAC members to consider the recommendations that the Board should prioritize when making budget decisions.
- **April 30:** There will be an update on the **operational budget** based on provincial funding.
- **May 15:** A special FBEC meeting will focus on updates to the operational budget plan.
- **May 26:** A presentation on the budget plan and core education funding updates will be made.
- **June 4:** The target date for budget approval.

Next Steps

- **April EPCAC Meeting:** This meeting will include a review of the budget details and the formulation of recommendations for the Board.
- **May EPCAC Meeting:** A follow-up discussion will take place regarding the operational budget.
- Members are encouraged to engage in discussions about the budget, provide feedback, and consider delegation opportunities.

<p>9. ICCAC/EPCAC Update</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 19: A joint meeting with ICCAC and EPCAC was held. The committees discussed their expectations for the Board and explored the possibility of collaboration. • Options Considered for Collaboration: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain the status quo. 2. Close and strong collaboration. 3. Merge the two committees <p>Continue discussion to evaluate the pros and cons of collaboration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome: The committees will continue discussions and evaluate the best path forward. Omar Khan- Co-Chair, ICCAC shared his meeting notes with participants and we will ask whether these could be shared with EPCAC members. • Spring Engagement: There may be potential collaboration with other equity-focused committees. This would allow the committees to discuss how their collective work is contributing to student success. • The committees will also seek Board guidance on strategic planning for the Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP) and how they can contribute to the ongoing conversation. 	
<p>10. LOI Feedback</p>	<p>A document on the (LOI) policy review was shared with the committee for feedback.</p> <div data-bbox="808 1243 865 1304" data-label="Image">  </div> <p>Framework for LOI Policy Review (2025 C</p>	

11. Other Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Derick shared an update about the Latino Taskforce: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group is gathering data about the barriers faced by Latin American communities. They are organizing a community event on April 26 for Latin American parents/students. • Trustees are encouraged to include event details in their newsletters. • Clarification from Trustee Williams: <i>"Is this event an affinity space? Who is invited?"</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Response: Yes, the event is an affinity space, but trustee participation is encouraged for support. Language from the official invitation will be shared for clarity. 	
12. Next meeting Reminder		
13. Adjournment	Meeting Adjourned at 8:34 pm	



Community Advisory Committees