



Jane - Finch's Caring Village

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TO: Equity Program Advisory Committee (EPAC)

Dear Sirs/Madam:

We, Jane-Finch's Caring Village in partnership with Firgrove Community Learning Centre, are writing this letter to bring a concern that has devastated our community to your attention. As a committee that concerns itself with equity matters, we are asking you to support us by strengthening our recommendations and joining us in our endeavor to seek justice for the children in our community.

Briefly, the Jane-Finch's Caring Village is a resident led nonprofit organization that promotes community capacity building by empowering residents to take an active role in their communities and learning of their children. For the past 20 years, the CV worked with parents and local groups to increase awareness about community issues and act as an advocate for finding possible solutions. In addition, in the summer of 2013 Firgrove Community Learning Centre conducted a survey of 137 parents which showed their concerns regarding their children's education. For years, we have fought to have systemic issues of inequities in the education system such as student transfer/promotion policy, suspension policy and lack of meaningful parent engagement to the attention of T.D.S.B staff. We believe, these injustices have a negative impact in our children's learning and ultimately from reaching their educational and life goals. In spite of our continued effort to raise these issues, we have not seen significant change to meet the needs of marginalized students in certain demographics and communities.

We strongly believe that parents are the first nurturers of their children and informed parents are engaged parents. Therefore, supporting and enabling parents to meaningfully engage in their children's learning is the best and sustainable way to ensuring children's successful schooling and their overall wellbeing. We all know, that barriers such as language, lack of mainstream cultural capital, and systemic oppression prevent parents in marginalized communities from having their concerns addressed in an equitable way; therefore, we are encouraging everyone to show their support and commitment for advancing the request we are bringing to your attention. In so doing you will demonstrate to the parents we represent that you support their right to be treated in a fair and equitable way. We are asking you to standing by Parents and support their struggle for a responsive, respectful and parents' friendly education system, which we believe is a key element of a fair society.

1. Transfer/Promotion/Retention Policy:

This TDSB policy has presented increasing concern in our community; we continue to see students moved from grade to grade up to grade 9 without obtaining the required knowledge and skills required. Those who are being transferred several times become further disadvantaged each year as a result of the academic deficit they are carrying. As a result, students either continue to struggle as best they can or drop out as it becomes evident of how far behind they are or when they reached high school. According to the policy, transferred students are supposed to receive support that will allow them to catch up in the next grade. However, our concern is that systemically the support is lacking resulting in students never catching up.

2. Student Suspension Policy:

We are concerned that students are being suspended in school or home with no follow-up to address issues why the student was suspended. Often, students are also suspended and sent home or kept in school without an official letter of suspension. In addition, all too often communication to parents about the suspension the plan of support, and the appeal process are minimal or none existing.

3. Lack of meaningful parent engagement:

In regards to both situations mentioned above, parent engagement is minimal. Parents are not engaged meaningfully or respectfully. For parents to support their children they need to be informed appropriately about the learning status of their children. Parents are not provided information about why their children are being transferred or a learning plan to meet the student's need after they are transferred. With regards to their children are suspension, when parents go to the schools, they walk away with disappointments.

We would like to have the following questions we are bringing to your attention in order to address the inequity being perpetrated on so many of the students in our community.

We believe that any policy that is detrimental to some of the learning and marginalizes students is an equity issue that needs immediate attention.

Our Questions:

1. When was the last time these two policies had been reviewed and/or reviewed?
2. How often are these policies being evaluated to see the effectiveness or the negative impacts they have on students?
3. How are these policies communicated to parents, students and school officials? Are they translated into different languages? What is the reading level needed to understand them?
4. Was there a written strategy (program) to meet the needs of the students and which has been evaluated to see its effectiveness?
5. How are parents being engaged meaningfully in the process?
6. When was the last time parents were consulted regarding this policy?

Our Recommendations:

- Both policies be reviewed to insure they are not disadvantaging certain communities/students.
- A strategy to red flag students transferred more than once.
- Review the support system and resources currently in place to meet the needs of transferred student, to determine if they are adequate and being utilized for their intended purpose.
- To put in place a strategy to communicate with parents about the issues facing their children that are transferred, to ensure they understand the policies and the plan to erase the academic deficit their children have acquired.
- Data of each school posted on their website showing suspension rate, number of transferred students and number of promoted students for each grade. We would also like the website to show how many students are attaining what level of success for the following category, 40% to 50% -50% to 60% -60% to 70% etc. We would also like to see, a list of interventions that were implemented to address these specific issues including measurable outcome indicators and a formal evaluation of the effectiveness of the interventions.
- Training for school staff around transfer/retention, suspension, parent engagement and sensitivity to student needs.

We are asking The Toronto district School Board to respond to these concerns before May 31st 2014 so that we can report back to parents and our wider community before the end of the school year.

Therefore, we are asking E.P.A.C. to strengthen and support our proposed recommendation. We also are asking EPAC to bring our recommendations to the attention of the trustees.

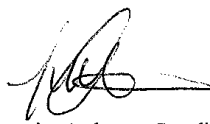
We thank you for your attention and we hope to continue to have the support of EPAC, on these issues of inequity affecting our community and many other communities.

If you require more information, please contact Jane-Finch's Caring Village at 416- 4915050 ext. 4740 and Firgrove Community Learning Centre at 416- 9814922.

Sincerely yours,



Almaz Reda, Chair, Board of Directors
Jane-Finch's Caring Village



Lorraine Anderson, Coordinator
Firgrove Community Learning Centre

CC: Donna Quan, Director of Education
Stephanie Payne, School Trustee
Jackie Spence, Superintendent
Local Schools: (Westview Centennial S.S., Brookview M. S., Oakdale M.S., Shoreham P.S.,
Driftwood P.S., Firgrove P.S., Top Cliff P.S., Yorkwoods P.S., Black Smith P.S.,)