**TDSB Task Force on the success of Students of Somali Descent**

**Meeting Minutes - Monday May 13th, 2013**

**Time:** 6:00PM  
**Location:** 5050 Yonge Street – Committee Room A


**Regrets:** Abdifatah Warsame, Ali Abdullahi, Trustee Chris Bolton, Hamdi Mohamed, Mohamed Haji-Nur, Mohamed Sambul, Patrick Knight.

**Minute Taker:** Zahra Hassan

### AGENDA ITEMS

#### 1. Dinner

#### 2. Welcome and approval of April 29th meeting minutes

- Minutes approved as amended
- Ali Mohamed chairing the meeting
- Meeting called to order at 6:15PM

**Items Arising: Women for Change letter to TDSB Trustees**

**Taskforce Members concerns**

- Focus has to be in the recommendations but there is a serious inaccuracy in the letter
- All of us on the Taskforce are doing this on a volunteer basis and this letter discredits our work and the process
- We did our best to outreach to different groups and individual around the city during the community consultations
- All the members of the Taskforce and everything the Taskforce had done is on the TDSB website - members, minutes, agendas, contact information of the chairs- this isn't a secret society. The work is transparent
- The TDSB Board of Trustees unanimously voted to create the Taskforce. This was an inclusive process and we had consultation around the city to include as many people as possible. Hard work went into the process to represent everyone in the community and this letter was surprising because it feels like an attack. The Trustees are impressed with the Taskforce and proud of the work being done and the dedicated members. Never the less, the recommendations put forth by Women for Change are worth looking at
- We need to move forward together for the future, otherwise the credibility will be lacking. We cannot allow grievances to cloud the future
- “As a member of the Taskforce, the letter is offensive”

**Women for Change Response**

- Not the place or the time to discuss the letter
- The letter is not regarding the work of the Taskforce but rather issues that Women for Change and others have experienced with the TDSB
- The May 17th consultation at TCI made us feel insulted and there was not a process where people’s voices/concerns were heard. We want to focus now on the students and how we can support them and make changes that will be visible 20-30 years down the road
3. **Review and discuss data collection and coded**

**Deadline:** If people feel it is too much pressure to get everything done in a short period of time or want more time to look at the data and come up with recommendation then we can move the deadline to August

- **Question:** What is the implication of moving the deadline to August in terms of having the recommendations implemented for the 2013-2014 school year?
- **Jim:** It depends on the recommendation. The recommendations will be implemented over a series of time - it would not be just for one year. Certain recommendations that could be implemented for the upcoming school year might be pushed back if the deadline is extended to August

**Discussion:**
- We invested a lot of time and energy to get the recommendations in by June. Let us move ahead with our original deadline. If we can get something done by June we should go ahead and we can move or deal with those outstanding items at a later time. The community expects a lot from us
- We need to respect the integrity of the deadline, we are accountable to a larger community
- We need to respect the deadline; some of the notes were received late by the interns and there was a lot of work that went into having them ready for today’s meeting
- Recommendations are coming from our research and out of the community consultations - now we have to make the connections

**Suggestion:** Move ahead with our original deadline - all in favor

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**Review and discuss data collection and coded**

**Presented by Munira**

- We looked at all the notes and came up with 7 re-occurring themes based on the 7 questions asked on the community consultations
- Summarized each theme out of the consultations

**Concerns:**

- Notes were erratic - It was hard to navigate around them
- All the data are not in - some people did not send their notes but we worked with what we had

**Q:** Need to add footnotes as to where some of the notes are coming from i.e., is it from the data, the community members present, geographic area, etc.

**A:** Data was erratic and it is supposed to be qualitative and not quantitative

We are acting as an impartial party - we are here to listen to the community and write down what they think and feel. But there is some need to back up the data

This is a raw data - we need to keep the perceptions community has and their opinions

**Q:** What methodology was used to summarize the data and how did we choose the 7 themes

**A:** There was a template created around the 7 questions we asked during the community consultations and we filled them in based on the notes collected. If a theme reappear several times, we highlighted it and came back to them

**Q:** Will this raw data be published

**A:** This summary is not to be published but rather to use in order to guide the recommendations. It is a workable material to not be put on the website

There was discussion on our last meeting to have the summary of the consultations put as an appendix to the Board’s recommendations but this can be discussed further
We are here because there is a crisis in the education system and Somali youth are being targeted and when we consulted the community these were the issues that came up. TDSB needs to be accountable and we need to be frank on certain things

Q: Is it possible to establish ombudsman to implement the recommendation?
A: TDSB ultimately responsible but staff can report back to the Board

Q: Who is in charge of producing the mechanism to ensure recommendations are implemented?
A: It is the Director of Education. You can have a reporting monitory group but it will not have power to implement – it is the TDSB staff's job. Trustees are not staff – they are policy makers and not involved in the implementation process

Q: What is the relationship of the Board to the City of Toronto?
A: The city has no direct capacity to be holding an issue at the table

Further Comments/Concerns:
- People feel the need for Somali individuals to be part of the process to hold the Board accountable to the recommendations. Have a follow-up committee to ensure the recommendations are implemented
- We have an opportunity here to make recommendations to support the community. We need to think about what we can do as a community beyond this
- We have a mandate to exist and come up with recommendations; the implementation process is not up to us. We are in a legal process- let us finish the task at hand and we can come together a committee to see what else we can do
- Recommendations have come up before to the Board and we need to focus on the implementation process
- Monitoring process could be built into the recommendations

4. Brainstorming Recommendations

Special Education
- Create kit for parents that explains IEPs, why they are there and how we can re-stream their child back
- Mandatory written disclosure when student is put into IEP
- Eliminate unofficial process of special education and make the formal process more equitable
- Include all the appropriate people including parents and translators if needed
- The problems is not necessary in the process but rather lack of communication with the parents and students
- Communicating with the family and follow-through are key re-occurring issues
- Proper assessment and follow-up
- TDSB education focuses on multiple learner model and TDSB needs to move away from this model-this is pushing certain community in one direction

Transfer students
- Transfer students –parents need to be informed when students are being transferred without properly earning the credits
- Mandatory meeting with parents when a student is transferred

Communications
- Better communication between teachers/admin staff/parents

Expulsions
- Way to track expulsions and absenteeism rate and monitor them earlier to allow for intervention
Teachers

- Hire more Somali teachers
- Provide training and mentorship to existing Somali teachers and put them in a leadership role
- Sensitivity training for teachers and staff
- Somali teachers mentorship program – teaching new teachers the process of hiring and how to be the best candidate (AHEN is an organization doing similar stuff)
- Hiring Somali teachers not going to reach all of students – the key is to work with current teachers to care for all of our students and now just the Somali students
- The community feels a shift, that teachers do not care about our students - they are discouraged
- Students: Have more young teachers who can relate to us and know the struggles we are going through.
- What matters are teachers who care
- A lot of unhappy teachers are sent to priority schools – need to look at teacher working in low income neighborhoods
- Students/parents/community need to work together for the success of the child. Hiring new teachers not realistic – need to look at recommendations that will benefit all students and not just Somali students

Others

- Somali parents do not understand how the TDSB works
- More Somali parents in the parent council meeting
- Knowledge transfer process – mechanism where we can take the best practice and models that work to transfer them to other schools
- Early intervention starting in JK up to grade 3 by teachers instead of creating IEPs and putting them in special Ed
- Concept of Parent/Family literacy center in the schools with highly populated Somali students.
- We have Parent Academies and are working to extend to other schools around the city
- We need individuals that youth can go to talk to for help.
- Women for change started homework club and replicated in different communities which produced results – we need to get ourselves organized
- Decide on the number of community support workers hired and their mandates as well as process of evaluation
- After school tutoring program for Portuguese community – could have something similar for Somali community
- TDSB develop partnerships with other agencies
- Issues with guidance counselors – have Somali mentors go and work with guidance counselors to help the kids
- Have brief, about 3 minutes, YouTube videos in Somali addressing different topics to help parents
- Have Somali professionals come to schools or classes and record them as they give their motivational talks. Record the meeting for others to access and then overtime create a library filled with the Somali community doing great things
- Have the Somali Student conference as an annual event
- Have all students in the TDSB start in academic steam in grade 9
- Open up schools that are doing well to students struggling

5. Other Business

- n/a

Next Meeting: Thursday May 16, 2013
5:30PM Dinner
6:00PM-8:00PM Meeting

ADJOURNED: 8:47PM