

**SUMMARY REPORT OF AN ACCOMMODATION SYSTEMS REVIEW
FOR THE TORONTO DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**

Prepared by:

Runako Gregg

Barrister & Solicitor, and Workplace Investigator
Ethical Associates Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

The mandate of this Accommodation Systems Review is to examine the Toronto District School Board (“TDSB”)’s accommodation policies and processes to ensure that an intersectional analysis has been conducted in response to concerns raised by a TDSB student (the “Student”). The mandate requires the reviewer to “review the availability of and equitable access to learning accommodations of TDSB students and to identify any barriers that exist, in particular with respect to Black, Indigenous, and other racialized students who live with mental health disabilities.”

In addition to a review of pertinent TDSB documents, this report is based on interviews with relevant stakeholders, including the Student, the Student’s parent, school administration officials and senior Board staff, to determine how TDSB’s policies and procedures are working in practice to identify the barriers noted above.

MANDATE

The mandate of this review is to examine the Board’s practices in relation to the accommodation of students who experience intersecting issues between mental health challenges and race, and to propose recommendations to ensure that an equitable and intersectional approach is applied in such situations.

Although the TDSB already has a robust and comprehensive accommodation program in place, and devotes significant resources to ongoing improvements to Special Education and Inclusion, some process gaps were identified through the particular experiences the Student encountered. A significant gap was identified in terms of services provided to students who experience schooling at the intersection of race and mental health.

METHODOLOGY

In addition to meeting with the Student and the Student’s parent to discuss concerns of how the Student was accommodated during her time with TDSB, we also conducted a series of interviews with School officials and Board staff who oversee the TDSB’s accommodation processes.

Among the interviews we conducted with employees were the following:

- Senior Official in Special Education and Inclusion Office
- Official responsible for Guidance Counsellors

We also conducted localized interviews with others who are involved in administering special education initiatives in school settings, including the following:

- Principal of a local secondary school
- Principal of a Special Education School

Lastly, we conducted a data review of TDSB’s policies and programs related to accommodation and special education, which was submitted separately to the TDSB.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing Concerns and Enhancing Support: Recommendations for TDSB

The following consolidated narrative highlights the general themes raised by multiple interviewees and the documentary review, and provides recommendations to the TDSB based on the concerns expressed. The interviews encompassed various stakeholders within the education system, including the Student and the Student's parent, special education managers, centrally assigned principals, a secondary school principal and other individuals involved in administering special education initiatives in school settings. The aim is to address the identified issues and enhance support within the TDSB.

I. Inadequate Support for Students with Diverse Needs:

Multiple interviewees expressed concerns about the lack of adequate support for students with diverse needs, such as learning disabilities, mental health challenges, and marginalized identities. There was a consensus that the current support mechanisms, including individualized education plans (IEPs) and accommodation processes, are not consistently implemented or understood by all staff members.

Recommendations:

Mandatory Training: Implement mandatory training on special education, inclusive practices, and equity for all teachers, administrators, and guidance counsellors. This training should emphasize the importance of understanding and implementing IEPs, accommodating diverse learning needs, and adopting culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies.

Enhanced Professional Learning: Provide ongoing professional learning opportunities focused on universal design for learning (UDL), trauma-informed practices, and strategies for supporting students with mental health challenges. These opportunities should be delivered through a variety of formats, including workshops, staff meetings, online resources and professional development days, to ensure broad accessibility.

Transparency and Awareness: Improve transparency and awareness among students and parents regarding available supports and resources. Develop user-friendly guides and online platforms that provide information on the different types of supports, accommodations, and pathways available to students with diverse needs. This will empower students and parents to advocate for their rights and access the appropriate support services.

II. Ineffective Communication and Collaboration:

Interviewees highlighted challenges in communication and collaboration between different stakeholders within the education system. There were instances where students and parents felt that guidance counsellors lacked the necessary knowledge and resources to address their concerns effectively. There were also circumstances where special education consultants and child and youth workers were working at cross purposes with educators and school administrators.

Recommendations:

Strengthen Guidance Counsellor Training: Enhance the training provided to guidance counsellors, ensuring they have a comprehensive understanding of their roles and responsibilities, including knowledge of accommodation processes, community resources, and mental health support services. Encourage ongoing professional development and collaboration among guidance counsellors to share best practices and stay updated on evolving student needs.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Foster closer collaboration between guidance counsellors, teachers, administrators, and support staff. Establish clear communication channels, regular meetings, and formalized procedures for sharing relevant information and providing comprehensive support to students. This will ensure a holistic approach to student well-being and academic success.

III. Culturally Responsive and Inclusive Education:

Interviewees expressed the need for a more culturally responsive and inclusive education system that recognizes and respects the diverse identities and experiences of students. Concerns were raised about the lack of representation among teachers and counsellors, as well as the need for greater understanding and support for students from marginalized communities.

Recommendations:

Diverse Teacher Representation: Implement strategies to increase the representation of diverse teachers and guidance counsellors within the TDSB. This could be achieved through ongoing targeted recruitment efforts, partnerships with diverse teacher education programs, and mentorship programs that support aspiring educators and administrators from marginalized communities.

Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy: Integrate culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies and anti-oppressive frameworks into curriculum development and instructional practices. Provide professional learning opportunities for teachers to enhance their understanding of intersectionality, cultural diversity, and the impact of systemic inequities on student experiences.

Student Engagement and Empowerment: Foster meaningful student engagement by creating safe spaces for dialogue, actively involving students in decision-making processes, and incorporating student feedback into policy development. Establish student-led committees or councils that address equity and inclusion concerns, allowing students to play a role in shaping their educational experiences.

CLOSING NOTES

Addressing the concerns raised by interviewees requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach from the TDSB. By implementing the recommended actions, the TDSB can strive towards creating a more inclusive, supportive, and equitable education system. The Board's commitment to mandatory training, enhanced communication and collaboration, and culturally responsive practices will ensure that all students receive the necessary support to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.