



### **Ministry of Education's Consultation: Education in Ontario**

These comments are based upon position statements and current policy from the Toronto District School Board and my experience as a Trustee with input from the community I represent. Please note, I support the submission from the TDSB in its entirety. Submitted via e-mail on December 12, 2018.

### **How should we improve student performance in the disciplines of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)?**

- Guidance can be found in two TDSB Research Papers
- [TDSB's Research Series I: STEM Teaching and Learning in the Toronto District School Board: Towards a Strong Theoretical Foundation and Scaling Up from Initial Implementation of the K-12 STEM Strategy](#) published in 2016 by Erhan Sinay, Kamini Jaipal-Jamani, Ashley Nahornick, and Margaret Douglin
- [TDSB Research Report Series II: STEM Teaching and Learning in the Toronto District School Board: Deepening, Sustaining, Building Coherence and Fostering Student Learning and Equity](#) published in 2017 by Erhan Sinay, Anu Sriskandarajah, Ashley Nahornick
- The goal of the Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Strategy is to provide professional learning (PL) opportunities and build capacity among TDSB Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) teachers to enhance their STEM pedagogical knowledge, self-efficacy to teach STEM, and promote STEM implementation in classrooms. At the end of the first year of implementation of the TDSB STEM professional learning initiative, our research revealed important findings about administrator, teacher, coach, and student attitudes towards STEM education, STEM teaching and learning practices, and STEM professional learning practices. In particular, the findings provided insights into administrator and teacher perceptions of the value of STEM education; teacher knowledge of STEM pedagogy, resources, STEM careers, and collaboration in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs); teacher confidence and self-efficacy in STEM teaching; the frequency of use of STEM teaching practices to develop STEM competencies in students; student perceptions of teacher practices promoting STEM competencies; and teacher, administrator, and coach perceptions of the professional learning support provided.
- [Mission of the TDSB is to introduce STEM](#) – We need a trans-disciplinary approach to inquiry and problem-based learning – across the Boards to foster collaboration, creativity and innovation to prepare students to participate in a rapidly changing, technological and interconnected world.
- [STEM FACT SHEET I: Teachers ISSUE 1 August 2017](#)
- [STEM FACT SHEET II: Learning Coaches Issue 2 August 2017](#)
- [STEM FACT SHEET III: ADMINISTRATOR Issue 3 August 2017](#)

- MATHEMATICS
- At the TDSB, we value a strong partnership of students, staff, family and community, and will continue to collaborate towards attainment of the goals of our [Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#), including high levels of success for all students in mathematics.
- Improving achievement in mathematics requires a multi-pronged approach, including but not limited to, adequate resources, professional development, differentiated instruction to meet individual student learning needs, and time on task.
- All workable solutions need to be data-driven and evidence-based.
- [Teaching and Learning Mathematics Research Series I: Effective Instructional Strategies](#) published in November 2016 by Erhan Sinay and Ashley Nahornick
- [Teaching and Learning Mathematics Research Series II: Effective Intervention Strategies](#) published in November 2016 by Erhan Sinay and Ashley Nahornick
- TDSB Website – [Mathematics](#)
- Having a solid foundation in math is critical for success, and helps to enhance the development of global competencies including communication, collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, and global citizenship.
- At the TDSB, we are committed to supporting students as they develop valuable math skills and want to help them become active participants in their learning. Finding new and innovative ways to connect with students and make learning fun is key to success. It's important to use a variety of resources and technologies that actively engage students, and assist them with making real-life connections with mathematics.
- Some Recent Changes – Recently, the Ministry of Education announced a greater focus on helping students move forward in their number sense development across the curriculum. **Although the Renewed Math Strategy has been replaced with Focusing on Fundamental Mathematics, it is important to note that the mathematics curriculum is still the same.** Is the issue with the math curriculum or is the issue with the EQAO test?
- Improving Student Success in Mathematics – Over the years, TDSB teachers have continually built on strategies that develop and integrate strong number sense across the curriculum. Our focus on balanced mathematics instruction while helping all students to move forward in their number sense development will continue, in addition to our focus on mathematics instruction that is effective and aligns with the principles of inclusive design. We will do this in part by continuing to enhance our capacity to: examine patterns of student success; implement effective interventions to barriers to access; respond to student voice; design instruction that is authentic and reflects the lived realities of our diverse students; engage families; and build leadership and instructional capacity by selecting from a range of appropriate interventions.
- [TDSB Mathematics – Fact Sheet](#)

### **How should our schools prepare students with needed job skills, such as skilled trades and coding?**

- As per OPSBA's request, a targeted government marketing and communications plan, specifically directed at parents, students and educators, is needed to elevate skilled trades to an accepted, respected pathway. This should include the research and data that shows there are, and will continue to be, many opportunities for well-paid jobs in the future.
- At the TDSB, promotion and awareness of career options in the area of skilled trades begins in elementary school. Opportunities for commencing various elements of an apprenticeship and the opportunity to earn hours towards an apprenticeship begins in secondary school.
- [Skilled Trades and Technologies at the TDSB](#)
- Connectivity, robots and rapid prototyping using 3-D printers are some of the technologies impacting the learning required for journeypersons, also known as skilled trades people. For example, electricians, carpenters and aircraft technicians are a few examples of trades requiring intensive study, which blends technology with careers and academic learning
- At the TDSB, there are many ways to explore the over 300 skilled trades and technologies that contribute to our economy. These include: the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship (OYAP) program, technological education programs in 10 broad-based areas of study, the Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) and dual credit programs at Toronto's colleges. Apprenticeship is a post-secondary pathway which incorporates college study with work-integrated experience, hence the term live your learning!
- The Provincial Building and Construction Trades Council of Ontario and College/University rules and regulations guiding apprenticeships in Ontario should be reviewed and amended as required to remove any barriers for secondary and post-secondary students to secure apprenticeship positions in the various skilled trades upon graduation (e.g. ratios, staffing numbers).

### **What measures can be taken to improve provincial standardized testing?**

- If EQAO's primary purpose is to gauge how well students are doing provincially in relation to Ontario's curriculum in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics is it actually doing such? How does this test differ from assessment? EQAO is only one source of data used at the school level, but it has taken all the focus.
- OPSBA released a [Discussion Paper](#) in December 2016 with seven key recommendations regarding EQAO and large scale testing in Ontario. These include eliminating cultural bias, reducing student anxiety, improving communication with parents and the public positioning of EQAO results.
- This Discussion Paper was shared with Dr. Carol Campbell and the five advisors that recently led an independent review of Ontario's student assessment and reporting - [Findings and Recommendations from the Independent Review of Assessment and Reporting Ontario: A Learning Province](#). Over 866 people attended in-person and on-line engagement sessions as well as 4100 responses to the on-line survey and with input from over 100 stakeholder organizations and 44 written submissions.

- The broad consultation led to a series of recommendations that *“call for a greater emphasis on and support for classroom assessments conducted by the teachers who work with students every day. They also recognize that large-scale Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments provide important public information about the performance of Ontario’s education system and inform improvements that benefit students.”*
- Improving communication to parents to clearly understand the purpose of EQAO, reducing anxiety for students during the administration of the assessment, removing cultural bias in questions and ensuring that EQAO is not inappropriately used (e.g. Fraser Institute) to negatively impact the reputation of schools and students would be important areas of improvement for the government to consider. All of these considerations were included in the recommendations of the Campbell Report - *“There was a strong consensus about the need for changes in EQAO assessments. There is a high level of concern about the current nature and impact of EQAO assessments given commitments to student equity and minimizing undesirable indirect effects of assessments, on students’ learning and well-being. In particular, there were concerns about whether Grade 3 is an appropriate age for large scale assessments in light of concerns about children’s development, well-being and anxiety; whether Grade 9 is an appropriate time as students were transitioning into the first year of secondary school; and finally, whether the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) is outdated and should continue to be a one-day assessment linked to a graduation requirement. EQAO test results provide useful information to support school, school board and education system improvements but too often the data is also used to measure individual student performance or rank schools, which causes confusion and can be damaging.”*
- We would hope the recommendations here in the [Executive Summary](#) of the Campbell Report will be implemented.

### **What more can be done to ensure students graduate high school with important life skills, including financial literacy?**

- The focus of the [TDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#) is simple: to ensure that every student receives a great education by having equitable access to programs and resources and increased opportunities to lead to success.
- This plan – and its action plans – lays the ground work for how we will transform student learning, create a culture of well-being, provide access to learning opportunities, allocate resources strategically and build strong partnerships.
  - Measuring our success is critical to know we are making a difference for students. Our expectation – and our goal – is that everyone improves. We expect to:
    - Close the achievement and well-being gaps while keeping expectations high for all students because we are providing access to the programs, resources and learning opportunities that students require, while removing systemic barriers that may exist for them.
    - Transform student learning to ensure students improve in literacy and math and strengthen essential skills including critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, citizenship and character (known as global competencies).

- Increase engagement of students, staff, parents and communities because we are honouring voice, experience, identity and expertise, and we are willing to adjust our directions and plans because of this engagement.
- Real change happens in the classroom and with this coordinated and strategic approach, we are confident that each and every student will be successful.
- FINANCIAL LITERACY - There needs to be explicit curricular references, associated resources and professional learning opportunities provided for teachers to ensure that all school boards have the same tools and expectations to implement financial literacy in a more consistent way.
- The resources need to be age-appropriate and include applications that can be used at school and shared with parents for use at home.
- Promoting positive student mental health and well-being to develop resilience, which is an essential life skill, needs to continue to be integral to a well-rounded education.
- MENTAL HEALTH - Students cannot learn if they are experiencing mental health issues. We need to continue to partner with students, families and others (e.g., School Mental Health Assist, Ministry of Education, and Toronto Public Health) in the development and implementation of well-being actions to enhance student resilience, coping and help-seeking skills and on strategies to address substance abuse and addictions (i.e., cannabis, opioids).

#### **What steps could schools take to ban cellphone use in the classroom?**

- We do not support the premise of the question.
- The TDSB does not support a ban on cell phones our policy makes it clear they are not allowed to be used in class unless the teacher provides permission. That is in every student agenda.
  - *Technology is used often in classrooms to engage, enhance, and support student learning. The TDSB is focused on enabling more technology-based learning tools by adding Wi-Fi zones to further modernize our schools and help to improve student learning in the digital age. We also understand that students bring their own devices, such as smart phones and laptops, to school. This can be an important way for parents and guardians to stay connected and engaged with the learning of their children, as well as a way to reach each other, when necessary. It is important to make sure that they are used responsibly, do not interfere with learning and respect the rights of others at all times. To learn more, visit your school office or speak to your Principal.*
- Local school boards should continue to be permitted to make their own local decisions that allow individual schools and teachers to make age-appropriate classroom decisions about the use of technology, including the use of cell phones.
- Students need be discerning digital citizens and opportunities should be provided within the curriculum to allow students to safely explore various uses and risks of technology in an intentionally guided and supportive environment.

### **How can we build a new age-appropriate Health and Physical Education curriculum that includes subjects like mental health, sexual health education and the legalization of cannabis?**

- You can start with the 2015 curriculum and go from there. All of the components of a modernized Health and Physical Education (H&PE) curriculum need to be explicit such as mental health and well-being, student safety, consent, LGBTQ, gender identity and family realities grounded in human rights and equity, as in the 2015 revised H & PE curriculum.
- The legalization of cannabis, which is already being taught, can be added.
- It's 2018 not 1998 – I was vocal from the outset that in spite of that edict, it is the role of trustees in the *Education Act* to promote student achievement and well-being... to promote a positive school climate... to promote the prevention of bullying and deliver effective and appropriate educational programs.
- The polarizing decision is not made in the best interests of students – elements such as same-sex families, gender, consent, sexting and online safety are now essential components of a health and physical education in 2018. I was proud that the TDSB was the first board to issue a statement to ensure that each and every student, such as LGBTQ students, feels included and reflected in our schools and classrooms... this means that learning about real-world topics relevant to today's students will continue in the classroom and teachers will be supported to do this.

### **What elements should be included in a Ministry of Education Parents' Bill of Rights?**

- The concern with the "Parents' Bill of Rights" is how it may be used to undermine the system – there are real concerns with efforts to defund public schools by creating a voucher system as referenced in E&Y
- There is also a real concern it could be used to allow parents to withdraw children from school where they disagree with what is being taught – whereas parents in Ontario already have the ability to request religious accommodation in all public schools – but it cannot be used to "opt out" of topics that they may disagree with covered under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, for example teacher about gender, LGBTQ issues, etc. Our schools must be inclusive where all feel valued and respected and see themselves reflected in curriculum.
- Every parent in the province of Ontario should have the right to send their child to a publicly funded school in the neighbourhood where they live – where they can walk to; a school that is resourced to ensure the success/educational needs are met of all students in the neighbourhood they've chosen to live; a school that is well-maintained both inside and outside of the building;
- At the TDSB we continue to promote the many opportunities for parents and caregivers to be actively engaged in their child's education (e.g. volunteering, attending meetings or being a member of a school council or the Parent Involvement Committee, attending standing committee and school board public meetings, participating in parent nights, conferences, local and board-wide consultations).

- A specific example of successful parent engagement are the *Parents Reaching Out Grants* that were “designed to support parents in identifying barriers to parent engagement in their own community and to find local solutions to involve more parents in support of student achievement, human rights and equity, and well-being.” Funding of these should be reinstated immediately.

**Do you have any other feedback or ideas?**

- Recognition and support for the continued implementation of the Calls to Action of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).
- The principles of equity, social justice, culturally relevant and responsive teaching need to be fundamental to all curricular revisions in order to provide a supportive, nurturing learning environment that is respectful and inclusive of Ontario’s student diversity.
- Benchmarks need to be updates in order to meet community expectations – they do not work in Toronto – for example, Special Education services as well as capital.
- School boards need predictable funding levels, including a degree of local flexibility to provide support to meet student needs within their local context. Specifically school boards across the province according to OPSBA need to continue to provide:
  - Safe, well-equipped facilities in good repair;
  - New schools in growth areas – the ability of the TDSB to collect Education Development Charges (EDCs);
  - Reliable transportation;
  - Readily available and current resources for relevant instruction and learning;
  - Ongoing professional learning opportunities for educators to continually build capacity;
  - Specialized supports for students with a range of special needs and mental health issues as required;
  - Learning and working environments that respect equity, diversity and the principles of social justice.