



Ward 8 Forum – COMBATING HATE – March 7, 2022

MEETING NOTES

Meeting (held on the Zoom platform):

Meeting host: Trustee Shelley Laskin (Eglinton-Lawrence and Toronto-St Paul's)

Moderator: Roni Felsen (Superintendent of Education/SEO, Learning Network/LN 06)

Panelists:

- Kasey Crump (Secondary Teacher, Lawrence Park Collegiate Institute)
- Andrea Gillard (Elementary Principal, Glen Park Public School)
- Denise Humphreys (Superintendent of Education, Learning Network 04)
- Salima Kassam (Centrally Assigned Principal - Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression)
- Laura-Ashley Meghie-Rodriguez (Elementary Teacher, Humewood Community School)

Other Staff: Superintendent Andrew Howard (LN05); Jeannette Hughes & Wilmar Kortleever (Shared Services Liaisons)

Attendees (total #: 59): Teachers, Vice Principals, Vice-Principals, other school & TDSB staff; Parents/Guardians/Caregivers; Community Members

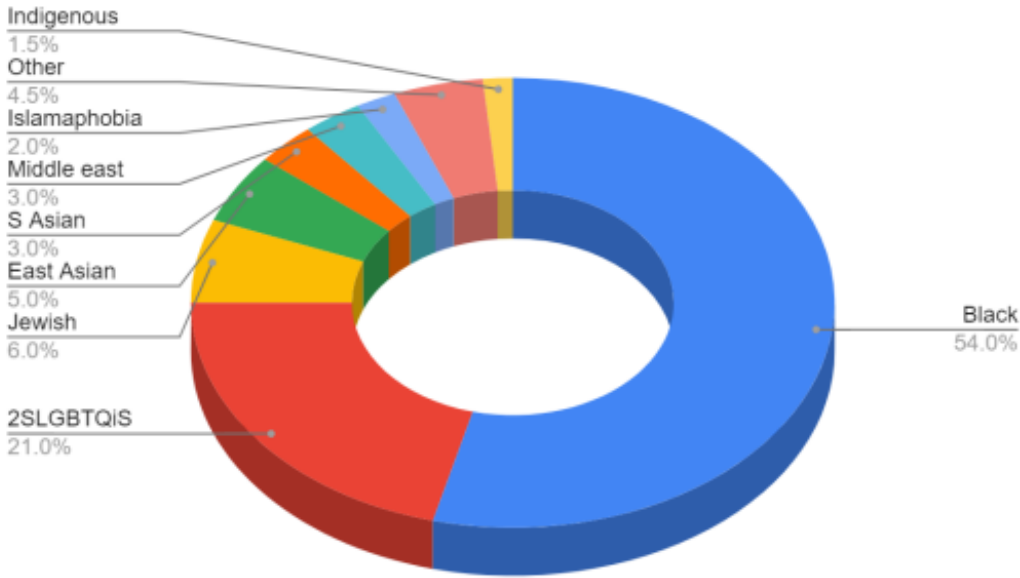
After the land acknowledgement, **Trustee Shelley Laskin** welcomed everyone. This is a second meeting under the general banner of Combating Hate. Notes and Materials from the facilitated meeting in November about Online Hate are still available on the Ward website www.tdsb.on.ca/Ward8. A number of incidents of hate, racism and oppression have happened in and outside the Ward, and a critical question asked has been *What are you (the Board) going to do about it?* – which is the topic for this meeting: what are we doing about it.

After **Superintendent Felsen** introduced the Panel, **Superintendent Humphreys** presented an [opening statement](#) (clickable link to google doc). With the Ministry of Education stating, *“Ensuring equity is a necessary foundation for improving student achievement, student and staff well-being, and promoting confidence in the publicly funded school system.”* TDSB has been at the forefront of collecting, disaggregating, and analyzing data to improve the

outcomes of students and staff from equity-seeking and sovereignty-seeking communities. Among others, it uses the Annual Human Rights report, Student Census and Parent Census data, as well as the commissioned [Enhancing Equity Task Force Report](#). Development and implementation of Procedure [PR.728](#) (*“Reporting and Responding to Racism and Hate Incidents Involving or Impacting Students in Schools”*) moves the accountability from just reporting into action.

Superintendent Felsen provided some highlights from the recent report [“Combating Hate and Racism: Student Learning Strategy”](#). It included numbers for [Racism, Bias, and Hate as reported from September 2021 through December 2021](#), and a graphic representation of the student-centred, pro-active [Student Learning Strategy](#),

TDSB Reported Racism, Bias, and Hate Portal Data Sept 1, 2021 to Dec 31, 2021 continued



which includes Classroom instruction, Cyber Safety & Digital Citizenship, Tools for Response Taking Action, Educational Partnerships for Learning, and Student Leadership.

Seven questions were posed to the panel about work being done ‘on the ground’ to combat racism and hate.

Question 1: How does knowing the school and classroom community support equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression work in our School Improvement goals?

In her [answer](#), School **Principal Gillard** stressed that leaders should know their community and everybody in it, to create a strong culture against intolerance. Everybody needs to be part of learning, noticing, and addressing any forms of hate or prejudice. Clear frequent messages need to be school-wide and within the classroom that students in their school are welcome, safe from harm, and supported by the adults who are responsible for their well-being.

Junior/Intermediate **Teacher Laura-Ashley Rodriguez** is passionate about social justice, combating hate, and anti-racism. Her [story-form presentation](#) stressed Love, and included a video presentation that her students did for Black History Month. The death of George Floyd galvanized what kind of teacher she wants to be as a black educator: raising young people dismantling systemic racism. Being an anti-racist leader can be overwhelming, but also very rewarding. Ms. Rodriguez main message every day: *Go out into the world and be good people making good choices.* A class example was watching “Remember the Titans” for movie analysis. Other examples provided were the [Crumpled Paper Activity](#), the [Assumptions Activity](#), and the [Dot Activity](#).



Ms Rodriguez stresses her students to think critically: not shying away from the hard questions, while being honest that you do not know all the answers. For this, it is critical to know your students. Regular questions during attendance inquire about their background, and for example favourite traditional meals. This generates conversation: connecting with

students and them with each other. Every Friday is Culture Friday, with students presenting something from their culture: for example, playing Italian Card games. Last week a Greek student taught the class the days of the week in Greek, and brought an artifact that was of significance to her. Other students related to that, and it brought everybody together. In addition to thinking critically, acting on it is important. For Holocaust Remembrance Day the class put together an assembly (in 3 days!).

High School **Teacher Kasey Crump** also highlighted the importance of building relationships with students – getting to know them. It helps with bringing in culturally relevant materials, so they see themselves represented, but also exposing to other perspectives and ideas. Humanizing socio-cultural issues that may not apply to ourselves personally. Teaching grade 12, Challenging Change, she has a box that students can drop topics in that they want to talk about the first 10-15 minutes of the day. The variety has been incredible, from the land acknowledgement to anti-black racism, the Olympics, and the recent transphobic and homophobic laws passed in some places. In addition to unpacking biases and hearing about different experiences, it also gives the teacher insights into new areas to further explore.

Question 2: What does school-wide learning require of educators in relation to combating hate?

For **Principal Gillard**, this means a commitment to learning and programming about equity, anti-racism, and anti-oppression, to knowing school SIP goals, and understanding that it is not optional. Her model addressing incidents of hate and bias emphasizes communication, empathy, reconciliation, and support to those who are harmed. Communication with families is important. [Read more](#).

Question 3: Please give an example of a lesson(s) you have delivered in your classroom to combat hate and what was the impact?

Teacher Kasey Crump presented two lessons she had done in the past 1.5 months:

As she tries to incorporate anti-oppression in as many lessons as possible, her Anthropology course started out with evolution and tied in a conversation about social Darwinism and eugenics, as related to antisemitism and racism 'science', using an article available through [Facing History](#) titled ['Breeding Society's "Fittest"'](#). It shows how social Darwinism and eugenics were used, historically, to justify antisemitism and racism. The lesson itself starts by talking about human variation and why people look different, and explains that social constructs cause real-world harm. Asking [questions](#) leads to very thoughtful answers, for example referencing confirmation bias, and how to use specific evidence to combat racist opinions.

Another lesson as recent as last week concerned racism in coverage of what is happening in Ukraine – e.g., referring to Ukrainians as ‘more civilized’ than people experiencing violence in for example the Middle East.

Also: using the “Power Flower” to look at intersectionality between religion, gender, sexuality, ability, race, and other, identifying power and privilege. Not to feel guilty, but to recognize it and find ways to use it for ally-ship with people that do not have power and privilege. Unpacking implicit bias and thinking critically about prejudice and how it can cause harm has been particularly meaningful because of antisemitism and homophobia / transphobia that has been going on this year.

Note: Facing History (www.facinghistory.org) is a TDSB partner providing teacher resources.

Question 4: As a system leader, what supports and resources are available to administrators and teachers to support the teaching of anti-racism in the classroom?

Centrally Assigned Principal Kassam assumed the portfolio of Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression past Summer, along with Teachers Learning & Leading. She appreciated the examples from Principal Gillard and Teachers Rodriguez and Crump because it shows how the work done by the Board needs to land on the desks of students. Furthermore, data as presented in the Combatting Hate & Racism report are of enormous value, while at the same time we should not forget the incidents that do not get reported, as there are people and community that might not feel safe to do so. We need to keep looking (out) for those who are not represented.

Through all the stories of harm and violence, Principal Kassam has hope, and is encouraged that the kids are going to be OK. There so many young people who want to be engaged in this work. Related are three important words: Affirmation before Oppression. Combating hate should not start with just stories of oppression and deficit, as it negates the stories of beauty and brilliance, and resiliency.

As a system leader, Principal Kassam looks to ensure equity, anti-racism, and anti-oppression, indeed addressing hate, are not ‘add-ons’. It needs to be integrated in the School Improvement Plan, in the teaching. TDSB does not determine curriculum, as that is provincial, but there can be locally designed curriculum, and as such, the Urban Indigenous Education Centre has been supported Indigenous education courses. There have also been pilots of courses specifically addressing anti-black racism, and the board has advocated for genocide curriculum.

Note: examples of such courses are IDC4U: Anti-Black Racism Interdisciplinary course, and CHG38: Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity.

Otherwise, Principal Kassam's work is it is about supporting school-based and central administrators, as well as educators and classrooms, to do this work in really intentional ways.

There are many, many resources available, please check them out at www.tdsb.on.ca/About-Us/Equity-Anti-Racism-and-Anti-Oppression/Addressing-Hate. In addition to professional judgement from educators, it is crucial to do the work with the students and create conditions within the school and classroom for students to have agency and classroom educators to make the connection.

While acknowledging valuable work that has been done on the subjects, there are areas where the TDSB can do even better by naming Antisemitism (including anti-Jewish racism) as well as Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism. We also do not speak enough about ableism, or gender, or sexuality. In addition, we need to guard against competing oppressions – it is about liberation, about naming and seeing intersections.

Resources: internally within the TDSB, the Center of Excellence for Black Student Achievement with contributions from the urban Indigenous Education Center and the Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression team have created a document for addressing hate with some resources for educators and are looking to also provide resources on the external website to be used by parents and families.

Click for: [more on Principal Kassam's perspective](#).

Question 5: What practical strategies support your planning for student learning as a school team/ Learning Network team?

Superintendent Humphreys: Key learning of (vice) principals is centered not only on operations, but also our school improvement planning goals which speak to student achievement, student and staff well-being, Equity and Anti-Oppression, and Indigenous education goals. All those goals have an equity and anti-oppression lens embedded into it (as opposed to before, when equity and anti-oppression used to be off to the side).

Differentiated strategies are important: not only looking at resources for instructional leading (helping staff effect change), but also actual work done to build relationships with communities.

Suited for varied-learning people, multiple strategies are in place for use by and between Administrators (click for: [a list of \(8\) strategies](#)). They include speakers/workshops, professional

learning, case studies (so that otherwise perhaps isolated administrators can share best practices), sharing of school improvement plans (including a shared google site). Prior to the pandemic, we also did learning walks with small groups of administrators.

Inspiring and pushing each other is important, including the Superintendent being a *critical friend* who holds people accountable when the work is not being done, a role that works if the relationship has been nurtured.

Principal Gillard presented several strategies applied at her school (Click for: [the full list](#)):

- You can not do it alone – build a team
- Develop Teacher Equity Leads
- Incorporating student voice
- Support meaningful and accessible connections to culturally responsive resources
- Frequently Review Policy and Procedure with staff – most recently PR531 (*“Selection and Approval of Learning Resources”*), examining problematic representations in texts based on stereotypes of race, culture, ability, and language.
- Professional Reading – based on *Cultivating Genius Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy*.
- Professional Learning Communities
- Criticality (the capacity and ability to read, write, think, and speak in ways to understand power and equity in order to understand and promote anti-oppression).
- Collect and analyze data
- A standing item of Equity and Caring & Safe Schools on the staff meeting agenda.
- Daily affirmations and announcements - focusing on the value of good character, beliefs, and perceived strengths to motivate students to succeed, and work toward and strengthen the negative effects of bias
- Mental Health & Well-Being: Mindful Mondays & Wellness Wednesdays, as well as looking to build tool kits for students bullied or targeted.
- Gratitude Journaling and storytelling with an Indigenous Focus

Question 6: How has parent voice supported this work and learning at your school? What can parents do at home to support the learning at school?

Teacher Rodriguez: Sometimes the discussion with a student is about navigating that the information they get at school is different from what they hear at home. Knowing students and their cultures is important, as well as constant communication with families. Providing parents/caregivers with resources they need to help their child.

Sometimes you are at odds, which we are all navigating as educators and as human beings.

Constant, open communication is essential: letting people know what you are doing in class, what lens you are using. You will not always change each other's point of view, but developing student's critical thinking is important.

Teacher Crump: It is incredible that a lot of families are providing their students the space to explore the topics of anti-oppression. Doing that work with your children is essential: self-learning is the key, and having meaningful conversations with your child at home around gender, sexuality, ability, and race. If we are not having these conversations other than in the classroom, they become taboo.

Teacher Rodriguez: The most important part of having the uncomfortable conversation about race, is starting it. As a parent, show your child you are willing to learn – be a role model.

Click for: [suggestions from Principal Gillard](#).

Question 7: What benefits have you seen in relation to equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression learning in your team?

Central Principal Kassam: The team (of a system superintendent, a Centrally Assigned Principal, a program coordinator and learning coaches) works closely together with the Center of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, and currently has two secondees: one from the Center of Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA), and one from the National Canadian Council for Muslims (NCCM). These voices from two very large communities with multiplicities of voices are guiding the work of naming and framing some forms of oppression that have in the past not as explicitly been addressed on a TDSB system perspective. That, and addressing anti-Palestinian racism, are pieces we have been working on.

We are also working with the special education team to look at ability and disability. The learning has been to expand and name multiple forms of oppression, bringing it back to a connected form of liberation and justice without one oppression being more than another.

Additionally, this year the board has been able to name what we are seeing as hate. Combating and addressing hate has previously never had a specific strategy. This sets us up to creating space for students to be agents of change, and have educators reflect on what the legal, moral, and ethical responsibilities are - both as part of the Ontario College of Teachers and what it means under the Human Rights Code that governs our work as well.

Superintendent Humphreys: The biggest shift has been the ability not to use ignorance as an excuse for teaching something wrongly, or not knowing the proper way to teach it. Naming and noticing is one thing, but it is much more widely understood, now, that

regardless of your intention, the impact of your action or inaction matters. Over the last three years, people are pausing and asking questions, learning and unlearning. Bringing in other people's perspectives and incorporating it may lead to discomfort or hesitancy, but not doing it is more problematic.

Click for: [more learning by Principal Kassam an Superintendent Humphreys.](#)

Principal Kassam: It is also about listening if somebody is experiencing a form of hate or oppression. Being able to engage in a critical conversation. And beyond listening, hearing. Because there is an active component to it. The work to interrupt and act should not be on the folks from communities that experience the inequity, racism, or oppression. We all have that responsibility. As an organization, the question is how we do that together and lift each other up through being a critical friend by building relationships. We must be able to call each other in, or call each other out in respectful, productive ways that lead to action. Especially in such an emotionally charged time as this. So many communities are feeling the emotion because of generational trauma, historicity, or what is happening in front of our eyes. What is our collective responsibility to our collective humanity?

Principal Gillard: Silence amplifies isolation. We cannot stay silent because victims need timely responses and messages that they are valued.

QUESTION & ANSWERS

QUESTION: How are we addressing collective trauma that we go through? Learning does not happen before safety, so how do we create a safe space, for example if my daughter's grade 12 class gets interrupted with shocking racial slurs? What can be done to ensure a safe space, beyond performative statements?

Answer: Thank you for sharing. A student who does not feel belonging, who is in fight-or-flight mode, has difficulty to just *exist*, never mind *resist*. It starts with the classroom, how the students see themselves, extending out to the school and then to the system.

From curricular perspective, this is where representation is important. Students need to see themselves through a variety of texts, guest speakers, or through understanding of subject areas. Being represented in the now provides opportunities to strive to something. This starts a circle of care.

Secondly, at the school level, this circle of care means that every student has a caring adult in the building. In the Education Act, educators are positioned as 'in loco parentis.' They do not step in the place of families but do have a legal responsibility. If something negative happens, there needs to be a trusting relationship. This also extends to the family, and community

agencies or supports the school works with, like social workers and psychologists. Lastly, at the system level, of interest is a large number of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical resources that have been made available by Mental Health lead Shameen Sandhu.

Note: Surf for these [Culturally Responsive and Relevant Resources](#) as well as many [Parent & Caregiver Resources](#).

Principal’s perspective: Give students the opportunity to talk and share their experience. Understanding the reasons behind student behaviour can help in the response. It should always be tackled with empathy and care.

Teachers’ perspective: Know your students. When you see something is off, it is time to act. Reaching out can lead to something as simple as somebody not sleeping well, or indeed something traumatic having happened.

Closing Remarks:

Superintendent Howard thanked Trustee Laskin for taking on this sometimes-difficult conversation. Despite incidents in the TDSB as well as wider society, this has been an opportunity to have a conversation and learn. He also thanked the incredible panel members, as well as moderator Roni Felsen.

These conversations can be difficult, but must be had. Combating hate, discrimination, and racism are priorities of the Board, and has been taken up head-on by Director Russell Rawlins. All of us are passionate about it.

Trustee Laskin greatly appreciated everything that was shared. We have long talked about these issues, but it has been hard to explain what we were actually doing. We are very grateful for Director Russell Rawlins and the new Student Learning Strategy. Education is the only thing that will help address hate. Trustee Laskin is grateful for this conversation that expands and includes everybody in the room. It is hopeful, as this is just a snippet of the care and compassion and human responsiveness of the educators across the Ward and the Board.

Please continue to check out [Trustee Laskin’s weekly updates](#), which will continue to inform about outward looking resources, which have long been missing but more and more are being made available.

For more questions, always feel free to contact Trustee Shelley Laskin (Shelley.Laskin@tdsb.on.ca).