

**Director's Leadership Report
Regular Board Meeting
December 8, 2021**

Good evening, Trustees.

I would like to begin my Leadership Report tonight, by stating that while there is always room in our schools for robust and respectful discussion and a variety of opinions – hate or intimidation have no place anywhere in the TDSB. It is the responsibility of our staff and students to adhere to the standards set out in our policies and procedures.

And, when anyone in our community feels threatened through the words or actions of others, the TDSB will respond. That applies to exchanges between students, between students and staff, between staff members, and how the community at large communicates with anyone at the TDSB.

As Director of the TDSB, I will not tolerate any attempt to compromise the safety and sense of belonging of anyone within the TDSB.

We are seeing the impacts of geo-political issues from around the globe appear here at home and in our school communities and they demand our attention and concern. These issues are complex and there are no easy answers to the questions they raise.

Understand when I say that on any issue, I am on the side of the students of the TDSB, their well-being, achievement and safety.

Asking questions and fostering understanding are at the heart of education.

On contentious issues, questioning and understanding require us all to have more introspection if we hope to educate one another. We need to understand how the beliefs we have held for all our lives, can be perceived entirely differently by others.

We need to question if in raising our voices, we are drowning out others who need to be heard. It is not a matter of simply having different opinions or perspectives but recognizing that in some cases our students have drastically different lived experiences - some of which have been traumatizing.

We have heard from community groups from across Toronto, and in some cases across the country on these issues, but I want to take a moment to speak directly to our own students and staff.

To the Jewish members of the TDSB community, I see your fear and anxiety that stems from incidents of antisemitism. Where our responses may have fallen short in the past, moving forward, the TDSB will recommit to creating a safe place for all of you, and that you never have reason to doubt our commitment to your safety again.

To the Palestinian members of the TDSB community, I see your fear and anxiety and we are committed to ensuring your identities and experiences will not be erased or go unheard. I recognize for many you do not yet feel safe in acknowledging your identity and commit to learning to eliminating anti-Palestinian racism.

The negative impacts of hate and racism in all its insidious forms — whether it is Ableism, anti-Asian hate, Anti-Black racism, anti-South Asian racism, Transphobia, or Homophobia, anti-Palestinian racism, Antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian racism, and Anti-Indigenous racism — stand as a barrier to our primary goal of creating engaging learning environments where every student feels respected, heard and understood.

We cannot solve the conflicts of the world in the classrooms of the TDSB, but we can foster an environment of open dialogue with the goal of creating a better understanding of the diverse and differing views present across our communities on important issues.

That will not be easy. We will need the support of those members of the TDSB community and beyond who not only believe this vision is possible and necessary but who have a collaborative action-driven approach about how we can **collectively** make it a reality for ALL students.

I have already committed to the following actions:

- Appointing an internal staff writing team for up to seven months to support, complement and augment the development of resources;
- Offering professional learning modules on antisemitism, and Islamophobia in addition to other forms of discrimination; and
- Seeking out guidance from external bodies, including the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Tonight I announce that staff will also develop a strategy that should unite us all -- a plan to educate and prevent the spread of hate which is on the rise online, in Ontario, in our communities, and sadly in some of our schools. In sowing the seeds of division, hate stealthily cultivates the ground to threaten our very existence regardless of identity. We must act. Coalitions for justice offer windows of hope in a difficult times.

If we can empower our students with the understanding that learning about one form of oppression does not diminish the struggle and suffering of others, we can lay the foundation of understanding we need to build a community of belonging and truly achieve equity across our entire Board.

For that dialogue to begin, I would implore everyone to listen first to the views that are not your own, and to reach for an understanding that may have been beyond your grasp in the past. We must embrace and celebrate our differences. Yes, sometimes, we will passionately disagree but we must remember that whatever differences may divide us, we have a shared humanity that can bring us together in our hallways, classrooms and shared spaces for one reason and one reason only - our children's futures.

This will be a long and difficult road to navigate. Racism and hate will surely serve as detours on our journey. Our actions will be imperfect and perhaps even fall short on occasion but we should always be guided in the shared purpose of the students we have the privilege of educating.

Collectively, we have the responsibility to raise critical and independent thinkers who feel confident in their identities and have the ability to uphold the dignity and human rights of others. This is a goal worth striving for even in the face of adversity and opposition, over and over again.

OTHER ITEMS

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts on these important issues with you this evening. As I conclude my Leadership Report, I would also like to briefly touch on to other items if I may. I recently had the opportunity to see the **impact of digital literacy skills**, when I met with three young students Jett, Ben and Matthew, who are 10, 11, and 12 years old respectively, from Island Natural Science Public School last week to talk about the app they developed together called Pocket Pod.

This management app is designed to help students, parents and teachers stay organized and it's all at your fingertips. It was inspiring to see these three young minds brought together by their passion for technology, their friendship and their undeniable entrepreneurial spirit. Listening to them speak, it was clear they've really put their hearts and souls into this app and it shows. They've been able to secure investors and plan to launch the app globally within the next few months. They have also had the chance to present their app to the Minister of Education Stephen Lecce, who I hear was impressed!

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. They have also launched HubPod School, a weekly online program for students from all over the world to collaborate and sharpen their problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

We are so proud of the three of you here at the TDSB. Congratulations and keep that passion for technology and digital learning alive!

Tonight, I want to close by celebrating the outstanding teachers who were recently announced as recipients of the **Prime Minister's Awards**, which you saw in that wonderful video earlier this evening for Teaching Excellence and Teaching Excellence in Science Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. The impact of an outstanding teacher cannot be understood, and, their ability to create authentic human connection and bring students together, is the foundation of everything we stand for in the TDSB.

I'd like to congratulate Andrea Payne from Allenby JPS, Katheleen Patricia Graham from The Elms JMS, and William Yu from North Agincourt JPS, who received the Teaching Excellence Award.

I'd also like to congratulate Cindy Law-Fong, from William Lyon Mackenzie Collegiate who was one of two recipients of the Teaching In Excellence in STEM award.

Each one of you has demonstrated a dedication to teaching students in ways that are innovative and engaging. It is clear, from the video shown tonight that you've made a positive impact on each of your student's learning and it's something we strive for here at the TDSB.

Thank you.

