

**Toronto District School Board (TDSB) Enhancing Equity Task Force**

Ward Forum 6: Trustee Arp, Trustee Gershon, Trustee Laskin

Date: May 15, 2017

Time: 6:30 - 8:30pm

Location: John Polanyi CI

PURPOSE:

* To hear from participants the ideas they have about creating the conditions for all students to succeed
* To introduce how we are operationalizing equity because it is critical for student well-being and achievement
* For school teams to learn how to lead a conversation about what is happening in their school to gather data that will establish baseline on equity for every school

A group of approximately 250 people gathered at John Polanyi CI.

Liz Rykert (Facilitator, Meta Strategies) introduced the evening, welcoming Tanya Senk (Central Coordinating Vice-Principal, Aboriginal Education) to lead a land acknowledgement to open the evening, also touching on the history of Indigenous peoples on this land and their ongoing presence going forward.

Trustees Arp, Gershon, and Laskin were invited to share welcoming remarks to the group. Liz then provided a quick overview of the meeting’s purpose, situating these Ward Forums as part of the larger work of the Enhancing Equity Task Force: to figure out what is holding us back from doing what we know we need to do.

Forum participants were invited into an impromptu networking exercise, where people rapidly shared challenges and expectations with each other and made new connections. People were invited to reflect on and talk about:

*“What are some of the challenges preventing student wellbeing and achievement at my school?”*

*“What do I hope to contribute to and get from and contribute to the session tonight?”*

The conversation was rich and lively, surfacing a range of ideas:

* A lack of representation, in this particular instance, of Muslims, in books that students have access to in schools is troubling especially given the current world climate
* We are all coming from different places and definitions of equity, so getting very clear on this is imperative
* There are entrenched cultures of privilege that dictate the narratives of what education is, what should happen in schools, etc. – these entrenched cultures are difficult to dislodge
* There is a need to explicitly address anti-Black racism at every school regardless of the percentage of Black students in the school
* Administrators and educators must build community with their students
* It is very challenging when good teachers leave schools
* There are systemic barriers such as staffing and budget constraints, but there is also power in the individual to make change
* Systems like academic streaming, French immersion, and how catchment areas work for schools can affect student’s pathways and their ability to achieve in their areas of strength
* There are many barriers within communities, especially barriers between teachers and parents

Jeewan Chanicka (Central Co-ordinating Principal of Equity and Achievement) and Tanya Senk (Central Coordinating Vice-Principal, Aboriginal Education) then provided some brief background on the vital importance of this work within the TDSB.

To begin, he displayed a slide depicting the ideas of Equality, Equity, and Liberation for the group to discuss amongst themselves. One person raised how equity means having a step up and being given an opportunity to see above the fence, whereas liberation is similar but adds choice and agency to the situation. Someone else proposed that true liberation would entail actual participation, rather than simply being a bystander.

Jeewan noted some reports that were recently circulated that call to attention some things we already know – that certain groups of students are systemically not seeing the levels of wellbeing and achievement as others. Specifically, he named that Indigenous and Black students facing serious challenges within the system.

He acknowledged how the TDSB cannot continue doing what has always been done while expecting different results, and the need to dismantle some structures that may hold these patterns in place. He expressed to the group that we need the community’s guidance in getting there. Finally, he noted that the TDSB cannot continue to consult; it is clear that people have spoken. Rather than asking people for their patience, the TDSB is asking people for their support and continual input. He provided quotes by Carl James and Paul Gorski about the barriers of racism and classism, acknowledging the various facets of systemic oppression and equity work. He noted the need to acknowledge these realities in order to think meaningfully about how to be better as a system.

Tanya then provided some history and background on Aboriginal Education. She noted how inclusion must be about everyone moving to the margins and coming back together, as opposed to inviting people to join in the existing circle of power. A Toronto Aboriginal Research Project in 2011 demonstrated that Toronto has the highest population of those 3 groups in all of Ontario combined. Tanya explained the idea of being hidden in plain view, and the challenge of self-identification amidst deeply entrenched colonialism and institutionalized racism against Indigenous peoples. Of approximately 240,000 Indigenous students in Toronto, it is estimated that only about 1,000 (0.3%) self-identify as Indigenous.

She asked the group: *What does indigenous education look like to you?*

A Grade 12 student expressed that while they agreed with Tanya about outward representation, one of the main challenges is the lack of understanding about Indigenous identity in our country. They noted how although their school has started doing land acknowledgement, the knowledge gap around learning the history and politics that are engrained within Indigeneity must be made as important and visible as the other things students are taught.

Tanya added on to this comment by further emphasizing the importance of creating safe cultural contexts together, especially given the diverse, complicated, and often mixed identities of Indigenous students. She called attention to the Aboriginal Education Centre and its role in addressing the knowledge and achievement gaps we see, and to the fact that not only were Indigenous children denied the truth of their identities, histories, languages, spirituality and cultures, but other students were also denied the truth of these as well. She noted how Indigenous people were actually never seen as part of Confederation, and how the idea of Canada must be reconceptualised.

She then pointed to some specific points from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action for Canada that relate to education. She also pointed to a number of other recommendations and actions from the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and recently two significant TDSB motions regarding Indigenous education: the land acknowledgement recognizing the enduring presence of Aboriginal peoples, and the development of curriculum resources that educate on reconciliation and treaties. She acknowledged Trustee Gershon who made a motion a couple years ago to create Indigenous educational resources for grades K-12.

She closed by noting the importance of honouring and talking about the significance of Indigenous knowledge, especially in the year of Canada 150. The erasure and disenfranchisement endured by Indigenous peoples was, as Senator Murray Sinclair said, made possible through the use of education as the primary tool of education. Now, barely 60 years after Indigenous peoples were granted the right to vote in 1960, education must be used as the key for reconciliation. Canada’s Indigenous peoples cannot be positioned as the inferior Other. Rather, we must work to highlight the achievements and contributions of Indigenous knowledge to Canada.

The group was then invited to form small conversations in their school groups to discuss the conditions for wellbeing and achievement in their specific school. People were invited to consider seven broad areas: Classroom Climate and Instruction, School Climate, Student Voice and Space, Family/Caregiver-School Relations, School Leadership, Community Connections, and Culture of Professional Development. These seven areas were adapted from OISE’s *Equity Continuum: Action for Critical Transformation in Schools and Classrooms.*

Groups, which comprised of administrators, educators, parents, teachers, and community members, were invited to consider what things are already in place at their school, and ideas that could be implemented after this meeting that would improve conditions for everyone. A handout was provided for participants to write their ideas down together. Two colours of post-it notes were provided to record individual ideas; yellow for things happening now, and blue for ideas for the future. These post-it notes were then put up onto large flipchart paper, based on the seven categories.

The conversation, energy, and activity across the group was rich. Participants were then asked to share any reflections or ideas that they came up with during the session. Some highlights included:

* One participant expressed the value of this activity, particularly in realizing the connections that they have made with parents and their gratitude for parents’ honesty and openness during the Forum
* There was a focus on relationship-building, as although their school is a very welcoming community the main challenges are a lack of understanding between cultures and groups
* The importance of building on commonalities – one group had a discussion with 3 schools around the table, so identifying common barriers but realizing we’re working towards the same goals was heartening
* A need to center the wellbeing and feelings of students, and understanding that these factors impact their success and achievement
  + Students are constantly graded, evaluated, and asked for more; adults should be working to listen better to these experiences and support in raising empathetic, compassionate students
* One parent expressed that in the end, we are here because education affects our children and we must focus on reading and writing
  + They highlighted how some students are still struggling with writing paragraphs in high schools, and asked why this is happening
* Someone noted that while it is good for these opportunities to come together and acknowledge the good things happening, in order for authentic and meaningful change to happen we must truly understand students’ needs and challenges
  + This also requires individual adults to really be introspective, interrogate their own challenges, barriers, perceptions, and misconceptions
* A parent shared their family’s journey finding Special Education for their child, and the struggles it took to bring them here
  + They emphasized the importance of working together and bringing community together, because education is the key for the future of our children

Liz then shared a Feedback Form tool developed by the TDSB to support every school in having these conversations across different stakeholder groups (administrators, educators, parents, students, and community organizations/partners). Although this is not compulsory, the hope is that each of the 580 schools participate. Results from these Feedback Forms would allow the Task Force to hear from each school, help establish a baseline to guide future work and track progress, and identify localized strategies to improve student wellbeing and achievement to act on. The data would also help inform the recommendations formed by the Task Force over the summer, which would be brought back to the community in a Fall round of Ward Forums to get feedback on.

She then provided some logistical details about the Feedback Form. Each stakeholder group would submit one Feedback Form, so each school would produce up to five submissions. They would be submitted online. Each stakeholder group would assign a Team Lead, and work together to find a collective voice to report on the Form. She noted that the Task Force will provide tips on how to convene conversations. The questions are modelled off the seven areas discussed at this meeting. She drew attention to a Comment Box at the bottom of the Form, which would allow for nuance and context to be added. For example, if it was difficult to reach an agreement on a particular question, or it was difficult to get feedback from specific groups of people, this could be noted in the Comment Box.

It was emphasized that the Feedback Form would be used as an aid to facilitate discussions at each school, and is not an evaluation. The baseline information established at each school would, in many ways, serve to tell the story of each school. Team Leads would assume responsibility over convening and engaging with people who may not typically participate in these conversations.

It was noted that the Task Force will be circulating tips and strategies on how to convene, facilitate the conversations, and also with specific instructions on the process. The final Feedback Form will also be circulated at that time, after incorporating feedback from all Ward Forums. This will be sent out at the beginning of June to Principals. It was raised that Islamophobia should be added to Item three under the section “School Climate”.

**Summary of Ideas Shared**

Yellow represents ideas underway and Blue represents ideas teams are considering. The ideas were generated in response to the question: What ideas do you have to create the conditions for well-being and achievement for every student?

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| Classroom Climate and Instruction  Ideas in place:   * integrating arts in literacy and numeracy * student choice in learning styles * universal design * cultural curriculum * rich collection of varied cultural books/resources (JW) * collaborative inquiry (Davisville) * accommodations for disabilities (Glenview) * providing authentic individualized support and programs (JW) * knowledgeable about where students come from (Glenview PS) * working with gender based violence group @ TDSB to work with students (McMurrich) * French immersion resource support (Davisville) * infusion of Aboriginal education (Davisville) * character education and assemblies (Davisville) * service dog (FHPS) * ensuring that there are up-to-date age appropriate resources for students and staff to use (Eglinton Jr. PS)   Ideas considering:   * empathy (VPMS) * sports teams * eliminate streaming * more discussions on success vs. happiness (VPMS) * surveys in library on diversity in text/materials (McMurrich) * looking at data and trends in terms of students gender, etc (McMurrich) * look at our resources to ensure all students feel welcome (Glenview PS) * incorporate Indigenous curriculum (Glenview PS) * widening the view of what a "normal" class is (SC) * student forum- monthly forum to openly discuss a burning issue of the month.   i.e. A & E; round tables of students/teachers asking questions to each other   * look into making a louder statement about class numbers/spectrum (Davisville) * de-center the Euro-centric curriculum * more focus on social justice lessons (collective commitment) (VPMS) * bunch of different learning modalities * a holistic history curriculum |
| School Climate  Ideas in place:   * Identifying biases and stereotypes within ourselves * access to technology, headphones, standing desks, other tools (Bessbrough) * working with students (JW) * full integration of HSP and ISP students (Bessborough) * gender expression- supporting with gender based violence prevention department (FHPS) * OISE reflection with staff (Humewood CS) * free cycle -opportunity for all in all community events. Free everything. (Davisville) * equity committee- students, staff, parents, admin (Davisville) * analyzing equity through an equity continuum (Davisville) * books available from different cultural backgrounds (Davisville) * continuing to build relationships with each other- parents, teachers, admin * rich collection of mindful storybooks (JW) * culturally responsive and reflective pedagogy * high level of extra- curricular activities- promoting recognition of student's strengths * building relationships and caring adult programs (Gateway P.S) * conscious intent on teacher's behalf to do novel studies representing different points of view (JW) * gender equity conference (Winona) * rich collection of aboriginal literature (JW)   Ideas considering:   * create a vibrant safe space * expand the diversity of our curriculum material (LPCI) * acknowledging our own biases (MCM) * showing respect to treaties before the National Anthem (Davisville) * culture of high expectations for all * staff education PD * learning tools to help acknowledge and modify important concepts for students with special needs * social justice in our own community * implementing more information starting in kindergarten, regarding different cultures * representation and portrayal of diversity (LPCI) * understanding and patience from all * changing demographics in our own school * identify artwork early in school years, posted in a central location * wall murals that reflect the diversity of city and community (LPCI) * schools as hubs (All of them) * childcare, after-school programming * clear definition of equity to be achieved by TDSB, and inclusion relative to the definition of equity |
| Student Voice and Space  Ideas in place:   * vocal students (Allenby) * students are empowered and represented on all committees (Bessborough) * student council (VPMS) * student voice * harmony * student led initiative for social justice (FHPS) * student led equity club (Humewood) * helping develop and promote student voice and student equity (Humewood) * character education (student voice/student led) (Glenview PS) * safe spaces (Glenview PS) * student voice/learning space, ERGSA, equal rights, gender sexuality alliance, gender neutral washrooms (FHJS) * school council representative of student voice (Dunlace) * social justice club (Dunlace) * students are creating student friendly spaces in the school where they feel included and welcome (FHCI) * learning partnerships outside of the school (cross-curricular e.g. connect with schools outside the GTA/Northern Ontario) * HSP students researched and presented to school First Nations topics such as truth and reconciliation * gender neutral washroom (NTCI) * technology as the learning accelerator (Gateway PS)   Ideas considering:   * student feedback * student voice is essential in all grades * more integration of various learning styles- student direct learning (Gateway PS) * leadership for students and mentorship opportunities (Owen PS) * honoring student voice (MCM) * empowering individual students and their needs (MCM) * student census- what do we do with the data? * student voice forums (Davisville) * student voice and engagement |
| Family/Caregiver School Relations  Ideas in place:   * talking to parents about issues and not always about money * caring adult programs and mentors (Northern SS) * more parents are coming out to parent council (Lawrence Heights) * accountability from staff and parents (Lawrence Heights) * getting more involved in the community (Lawrence Heights) * strong ESL program blended into school community programs (Davisville)   Ideas considering:   * TDSB does not provide sufficient opportunity for parents to interact in their child's academics * moving beyond fundraising- parents involved in other ways * honesty- everyone needs to be doing this * working with parent's to move out from the centre * parent involvement * make a welcoming environment * communicate teamwork school and family * understanding the beauty of different cultures * communication/reasoning * go deeper into ancestral lands acknowledgement * the role of poverty in the experience and/or as a barrier to equity and success in schools |
| School Leadership  Ideas in place:   * starting the conversation (LPCI) * confronting ISMS, and putting our students first (FHJS) * teaching staff is representative of the student culture/racial groups within the school * addressing issues as they arise around racism (Glenview PS) * responsive to student needs/issues/inquiry e.g. identity units based on playground language (Own PS) * coffee with the principal to discuss grass roots issues brought up by parents (FHJS) * incorporate learning into our staff meetings (Glenview PS) * PLC's ( school leadership) (Glenview PS)   Ideas Considering:   * school support and speaking up for special needs children (John Polanyi) * develop and utilize equity language that honors all learners * look into success criteria in certain programs * parent council when talking about equity on school based challenges (FHPS) |
| Community Connections  Ideas in Place:   * holiday baskets to help the less fortunate * community outreach/IMM worker (Davisville) * variety of extra-curricular activities for students (Davisville) * reducing phone use during instruction (JPCI) * integrating aboriginal music and acknowledgement in our daily activity and partnering with the First Nation School (Parklane P.S) * parent employment * "Pink Day", with the Police invited (Glenview P.S) * interfaith equity conference (Davisville) * naming the challenges (LPCI) * lions entrepreneurship unison engaging with community employment * corn roast * family/parent involvement to address gender identity/family structures (McMurrich) * METRAC weekly workshops for students (Winona) * community meetings with parents, students, and school to voice concerns (NICI) * parent engagement- food handlers, CPR   Ideas considering:   * understanding different cultures and the beauty of them (Lawrence Heights) * communication between the feeder schools, middle schools, and high schools (Lawrence Heights) * opportunities to lead family PD @ SAL meetings, to move away from just "fundraising" * outreach opportunities to provide safe space/ free space through facilities- build a sense of community and belonging * understanding different cultures in community * connection between partnership schools * inviting parents in for courageous conversations * more integration of lessons to understand First Nations * assemblies, events, cultural initiatives (LPCI) * outreach groups for better education * to honor diverse experiences within our community (LPCI) * hubs spaces in all schools- promotes parent engagement at all levels * village to raise a child * academic diversity in classes (JPCI) * have IEP intro to parents for common knowledge. i.e. flyers, school website, etc. (Gateway P.S) * planning 2017-2018 with our model schools CSW (Lan) (VPMS) |
| Culture of Professional Development  Ideas in place:   * bilingual books (Slovak, Urdu, Farsi, Arabic) (VPMS) * gender based violence PD - staff and students involved (Bessborough)( Owen PS) * V.D.L * math (VPMS) * focused accessing/purchasing of Indigenous /CRRP teaching and learning resources * inclusive classroom culture * Islamophobia lessons * building a culture of PD   Ideas considering:   * teachers that better reflect the population of students * trips- native cultural centre, pow wow (VPMA) * equity training for staff (MCM) * power/privilege * bias/assumptions- build capacity to challenge assumptions * PD that delves into the topic we as educators are able to touch on. eg. First Nations education - comfortable and confident in what we are teaching * faculty of education program- providing learning opportunities * release the purse strings for PD * work with adults to shift mind set (JWPS) * support teachers and staff in having courageous conversations * teaching more learning styles- more student inquiry, hands on * PD set by staff and provided at staff meeting- expertise shared monthly * more awareness of Roma culture and Muslim students (VPMS) * increased collaboration for enriched engagement |