

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

Ward Forum 8: Trustee Brown, Trustee Lister, Trustee Wong

Date: May 25, 2017

Time: 6:30 - 8:30pm

Location: Georges Vanier Secondary School

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 140 people gathered at Georges Vanier Secondary School.

Liz Rykert (Facilitator, Meta Strategies) introduced the evening and led a land acknowledgement, also touching on the history of Indigenous peoples on this land and their ongoing presence going forward.

To follow, the Trustees provided welcoming remarks to the group. They emphasized the importance of this gathering and highlighted the great turnout from all three wards in this joint meeting. The group was encouraged to be open and honest with their opinions and it was emphasized how crucial this deep-dive into equity is.

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 and reflections:

* In a school with a high East Asian population, with many families who are new to the country, there are challenges in encouraging parents to see the school as a more open environment to engage with and as a resource
* The challenge for educators and students with having increased integrated classrooms for students with behavioural challenges, who can disrupt the learning of others in the class, more supports are needed
  + The silence around this issue is also concerning
* The importance of collaborative intelligence and how to think in the right ways with people who are different from you and have different ways of thinking
* A student noted how students can feel nervous in classrooms about not wanting to seem stupid, and therefore avoid asking the teacher questions while trying to figure things out on their own
* A strong concern was shared about the high number of new students and families coming to the city as refugees, and their access to resources and programs in schools
  + Families choose to settle in areas based on a number of factors like proximity to friends and family, relationship with a sponsorship family, etc; however, their children may be moved from one school to another in order to access a program that is not offered across the Board
  + This is problematic specifically with refugee students, as they are already facing trauma due to uprooting; doing so with their school environment can be devastating
* A parent raised concern over the inequitable distribution of financial resources and supports in schools, particularly how certain schools are more desirable for reasons such as having specific programs or generally being better resourced
  + This disparity results in a positive feedback loop, where families who are able to afford getting into these schools will keep benefitting while those who are constrained keep losing out
  + The quality of education should be consistent and equitably distributed
  + Another parent added that the ability for certain schools to fundraise and then enrich their community and education with those funds results in the creation of a two-tiered system within public education, which is problematic
* It was noted that the system shuffles many students with Special Education needs around to different schools in order to balance school populations
* A concern was shared over a change in patterns with summer school (from grades K-8) that were originally offered to improve equity, but are now creating an imbalance as parents feel that their children will be at a disadvantage if they don’t attend
* The need to think specifically about the voices and experiences who have fallen through the cracks, particularly racialized students, was emphasized
  + TDSB Director John Malloy was recognized for his leadership and willingness to work in partnership with community groups like Black Lives Matter to address race-based issues, but it was also noted that this will be deep, challenging work
  + It was noted that everyone involved in the process from the Board and the wider community would need to look at our biases and experiences, who is in roles of power, how staffing roles are being filled, and beyond
  + A report that was recently co-written by Professor Carl James (York University) entitled “Towards Race Equity in Education: The Schooling of Black Students in the Greater Toronto Area” was cited as a resource that uses data and case studies to understand and make explicit issues of racial inequity
  + It was also asked whether the recommendations from the report would be implemented
    - Liz clarified how the Task Force’s recommendations will be developed based on the input of a wide spectrum of feedback: Working Groups by Learning Centre comprising of a mix of educators, administrators, Trustees, Board Members and Leadership, parents, community groups, support staff, and others; a Planning Group with a similar composition; input from community Ward Forums; and more targeted feedback specifically from parents and students
    - The process also includes incorporating a variety of research, reports, and recommendations from other sources, including community groups
    - It was raised that policies must be accompanied with action and accountability measures, and must truly engage in meaningful conversation with many stakeholders

Jeewan Chanicka (Central Co-ordinating Principal of Equity and Achievement) then provided some brief background on the vital importance of this work within the TDSB. He noted how sometimes, while trying to have courageous conversations, people don’t actually name what they will talk about. He acknowledged how the TDSB has not done well supporting LGBTQ+ students, those needing Special Education, coming from low socio-economic status, and the challenges the Board faces around anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. He noted how now, the question is about what action needs to be taken to change things.

He then displayed a slide depicting the ideas of Equality, Equity, and Liberation for the group to discuss amongst themselves, and noted how the TDSB has learned that equality is not the way. He shared how at a previous Ward Forum, someone noted how liberation means getting rid of barriers – and in this work, we must also ask ourselves who put those barriers there to begin with. 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 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, noting how these challenges aren’t just a TDSB issue, but rather an issue of education.

He also emphasized that everything is on the table with this work, and that it is the TDSB’s ethical, legal, and moral responsibility to urgently change the way things are done.

In Tanya’s absence, Jeewan also presented on Indigenous education and history, acknowledging the learnings and guidance he has received from TDSB Elder Dr. Duke Redbird in his work. He emphasized how the realities for Indigenous people continue to be challenging and distinct, noting for example how many Indigenous communities in Canada continue to live without access to clean drinking water. He also acknowledged the pain and trauma caused by the many missing and murdered Indigenous women. Within this context, only about 1,000 (0.3%) of the approximately 240,000 Indigenous students in Toronto self-identify in the TDSB. He noted how there are many complex challenges around self-identification, especially as it was used in the past to destroy families and identities, leading to Indigenous students often hiding in plain view.

He then emphasized the importance of creating safe cultural contexts together, especially given the diverse, complicated, and often mixed identities of Indigenous students. He pointed to some specific points from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action for Canada that relate to education. He 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.

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.

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 participates. 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 asked why the student voice would be limited to Grade 5 and up, and it was noted that the TDSB Research Department would be asked about this matter. The Research Department will also be working on multiple languages. It was noted that the Feedback Form for students would have more accessible language, and it was suggested that that language be applied to all Feedback Forms as the current language was felt to be too technical. It was also suggested that the Board look to other successful models of education from around the world for best practices. Parents in the group also raised that they were unsure how to answer many of these questions, and that for some people it may be challenging to engage in meaningful conversations with teachers and administrators.

It was also suggested that the Board and the Task Force imagine what having a better climate of equity would actually look like. It was noted that if we are to build something new, we must have a vision. It was suggested that the Feedback Form could encourage people to apply a positive lens to what change may look like. It was also raised that the Feedback Form feels evaluative, but does not provide any expectation or context on what things look like on the ground. For instance, what does it mean to have social justice central to the curriculum?

To close, it was expressed that this is a new strategy that we will try together. Further feedback was invited from the group on the Feedback Form or the process itself.

Feedback collected after the meeting:

* There must be ways to communicate that TDSB schools are following the Equity Framework Policy
  + A clear, concrete system of accountability to evaluate any given school’s strengths and weaknesses regarding policy must be developed
* There must also be ways of knowing whether teachers and administrators have a solid knowledge of the policy, and how it is being put into action in their school
* Regarding Special Education, if resources (teachers, EAs, etc.) should not solely be distributed according to how many IPRC’d students are enrolled in a school; resource distribution must take into account the students who may not be IPRC’d for various reasons outside their control (parent reluctance, TDSB restrictions and backlog, etc.), but have IEPs
* It was recommended that each school have a plaque with the Acknowledgement of Indigenous Lands and Territories as well as a LGBTQ+ flag displayed

Notes from printed feedback forms

* "The power in the school is shared by all stakeholders in different ways” Language needs to be more accessible
* "School staff are supported and encouraged to develop and provide leadership in different areas"- how would parents know this?

**Ideas generated as result of teams responding 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 already doing:   * more online/hybrid courses/e-courses remove barriers for students with special needs/mental health issues * junior and senior class sizes are sometimes too large- it's not fair to students or teachers, and it's hard for students to get the support they need (Don Valley) * more parent-teacher connection through teacher websites/academic workspace * homework club (Kingslake P.S) * extracurricular opportunities (Kingslake P.S) * implementing an inclusive curriculum checklist introduced by equity committee (Victoria Park C.I) * listen to teacher and staff ( Sir William Osler High school) * resources that reflect our cultural diversity * mindful moment * collaborative inquiry (teacher led) * use of technology- students/teachers (Kennedy P.S) * ability to access technology as needed * different instruction (Kennedy P.S)   Ideas Considering:   * more support for students who are ESL- children of immigrant parents need more time early ESL support * no more split grades in elementary school * students don't recognize the importance/value of education: not interested in the classroom. Needs to be explained how it matters or pertains/applies to the student's life (Newtonbrook P.S) * in middle schools with behavioral issues in their students(as evidenced by police cars parked outside frequently), they should have allied professionals on staff. i.e. Milne Valley M.S * not all students can be tested the same way-integrate a variety of ways to evaluate students (Newtonbrook S.S) * need high quality textbooks from elementary to secondary * move students with behavioral problems into other classrooms- they don't want to learn, they disrupt others learning * enrichment opportunities to encourage better performance- competition and challenge (Kingslake P.S) * consider classroom space- shouldn't be too cluttered or covered in distracting posters * weekly meetings with small groups of students and teachers to build a sense of community and mandate activities as part of the day * all class sizes including junior and senior grades need to be capped at 25. With approx 30 kids teachers don't have the time to get to know students and support them * increase educational assistants and special needs assistants trained specifically in Applied Behavior Analysis to appropriately instruct and accommodate students on the Autism Spectrum and with other social communication disorders in a regular classroom   \*\*Notes from printed feedback forms   * my daughter has just entered Kindergarten (SK), and the teachers have been great * the different work stations, giving a chance for each student to participate, and a play- focused learning environment has been great * because of the SK teacher posting on instagram I was able to be better connected to the classroom activities (Fairglenn P.S) |
| School Climate  Ideas already doing:   * celebrating differences in cultures * many faces (cultural fair that shares performances, food, facts, and activities like sports from different countries around the world (Newtonbrook S.S) * celebrating all the cultures   no labels for classes - all represented by animals instead (e.g. Orcas instead of HSP) (Lynngate Jr. P.S)   * our staff models collaboration and acceptance for students * providing equity training to school leaders (SLC, camp T leaders, girls about girls leaders) (Victoria Park C.I) * community potluck * wellness room/space, which is used and appreciated by the students * well-being zones of regulation school-wide (Kingslake P.S) * "Win- it" assemblies * mindfulness week * extracurricular * PALS * instead of focusing on a deficit model, move to a success/celebration model * safety patrols * "Funky Fridays"- play music during afternoon recess, students can dance * meditation after lunch * caring adults * leadership opportunities for students (Kennedy P.S) * DRA (Kennedy P.S)   Ideas Considering:   * continue having qualified specialist teachers teaching courses- should also include middle school * more leadership opportunities for K-2 grades (Kennedy P.S) * spirit days * some kind of plaque erected in all TDSB buildings acknowledging the Indigenous names and Territories * all excursions, special- ed forms for parents need to be provided in all languages (There are misconceptions because they are unclear) (Kingslake P.S) * LGBTQ Flag displayed in schools (L'Amoreaux) * the school has not been as welcoming as I would have hoped. As a non-custodial parent, I have been excluded from direct involvement. I account this to a lack of education for principals and staff. The only time a parent should be denied contact to the school is if there is a supervised access or restraining order. Otherwise every parent should be invited to participate * an inclusive school climate that recognizes children learn differently and methods of instruction that appropriately accommodate disabilities and other exceptionalities |
| Student Voice and Space  Ideas already doing:   * community circle * student council discussing issues and solutions * friendship bench   Ideas Considering:   * having a space where students feel safe "friendship bench" * student classroom reps for 2017-2018 * students don't speak out because they think there is no change- they need more representatives, a student council, and opportunity to be anonymous * Each child should given an opportunity to express their school experience. I find a lot of kids are not able to voice this since some students have complained about bullying, gender clubs, racism and family concerns * these children are falling through the cracks |
| Family/Caregiver School Relations  Ideas Considering:   * faith walk * full support involving families * TDSB or ministry to provide a document in all languages for all parents with ideas for ways they can help their child; homework, studying, etc. (Kingslake P.S) * increasing parent engagement by re-issuing the survey of needs/interests * parents communication- agenda, calls, e-mails * transitions- SK - Grade 1 (Daily routines; play based academics) Grade 3-4 (Classes of 20 to 30+) * schools need to ensure that every parent regardless of marital status is included in schools activity |
| School Leadership  Ideas already doing:   * P.A.L.S * bus monitors * safety patrols * reading buddies * class profiles- all students are discussed so every child is recognized   Ideas Considering:   * children should be given a chance to lead and to follow * how do we assess if school leaders are programming and leading with an equity lens? |
| Community Connections  Ideas already doing:   * more connections with community advisory committees- they are there to support * if students need jobs, job fairs come in to help them find them (Newtonbrook S.S) * created an accessible and open website * twitter * fundraising * settlement worker and curriculum night * parent night- to inform newcomer parents about Canadian education system * we have created an equity assistant curriculum leader position for 2016-2017 (Victoria Park C.I)   Ideas Considering:   * fundraising inequity- top third fundraisers should give money to programs in bottom of the 1/3 of fundraising schools * change 3rd party professional policy- explore how to phase in and out 3rd party professionals * co-ordinate services and funding between ministry funding (kids on spectrum- UNIONS) * more parent volunteers * more scholarships- just because a school isn't in an area where there is more financial need, doesn't mean students don't deserve scholarships * change definition of therapy * outreach programs- settlement workers * better translators * community walk * parents want to meet with union leaders so they understand concerns * make better use of community advisory committees- the general population doesn't know they exist and can help access resources * PIAC needs to be more promoted within the school as well as CLG and supports for parents * how do we advertise the amazing things that are happening in schools that are perceived as under achieving or less desirable? People want to go to certain schools ( with high EQAO scores), but students may be better served in schools which, for a variety of reasons have lower EQAO scores but superior programming |
| Culture of Professional Development  Ideas already doing:   * nutrition program * make it mandatory for principals to attend sessions such as this * collaborative inquiry * shared prep periods for grade teams * all assistant curriculum leader job descriptions have a specific equity requirement (Victoria Park C.I) * created a school equity statement and framework for curriculum development  (Victoria Park C.I) * achievement academics use common language strategies, time for all teachers to dialogue and come up with school wide strategies * teacher hiring: teachers with a "Low number" shouldn't get first priority for interviews; maybe ten rejections then they are provided resources to refine skills   Ideas Considering:   * strongly encourage teachers to consider how they are meeting the requirements to be inclusive in instruction (Victoria Park C.I) * embed accountability into the competencies that are part of the TPA (Victoria Park C.I) * review culturally relevant and inclusive lessons (developed this year) and devise units- spearheaded by the ACL'S and school leaders (Victoria Park C.I) * university/ college fairs/ visitations are not enough- students are interested and take action when they hear of people of experience rather than advertisement of post secondary (Newtonbrook S.S) * nutrition program * why have PD days in June- there really isn't professional development, why not have professional development before school starts * more trained EA, CYW, and SNA * core French teachers need a classroom- not a cart! * while teachers are trained to teach principals need to be taught to lead. This means they need to know how to deal with different homes and different cultures * there is quite simply not a culture of learning in education. I'm not sure why.....time, resources, inertia/culture |