

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

Ward Forum 2: Trustee Smith, Trustee Patel

Date: May 3, 2017

Time: 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Location: 140 Borough Drive, Rooms 3/4

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 125 people gathered at 140 Borough Drive, with a very high number of students present.

Liz Rykert (Facilitator, Meta Strategies) introduced the evening, welcoming Elder Dr. Duke Redbird (Aboriginal Education Centre) 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.

To follow, the Trustees provided welcoming remarks to the group.

Forum participants were invited into conversation with each other. People were invited to reflect on and talk about:

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

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

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

Some conversations centered around specific examples of things that happen in schools:

* + A student brought up how in some cases, the entire class may be prevented from going on field trips because a few students behave inappropriately in public
	+ Again from a student perspective, sometimes when students seek help from teachers they will get an explanation the first time, and then afterwards are left to depend on their peers to find out the answers
	+ Students also felt that sometimes, they felt nervous to share what they’d like to share with peers over a concern of what other peoples’ reactions might be
	+ A participant who sits on a Parent Council and acts as a community representative noted how many students are distracted in the classroom due to phones and other devices
		- They noted that although teachers may be doing a great job, such distractions may affect how students are learning
		- They shared an anecdote about their son’s night school, which had 20 students in grade 12 Chemistry to start, but dropped down to 7 after the midterm; when the parent dropped by the class, they saw that 6 of the 7 students were on their phones

The relationship between mental wellbeing/health and student achievement was brought up in a few different conversations:

* + A conversation between an immigrant parent and teacher discussed the emotional well-being of children at school when they are also facing culture shock and other high-stake emotional situations, and how the school community can have a positive role in this
	+ A student also shared how sometimes, stress and poor mental health will directly contribute to poor achievement, such as failing an exam due to stress

Larger, structural issues that are not limited to the school environment were also touched on:

* + Relatedly, often schools will touch on large cultural holidays but provide few other ways to immerse in cultural identity, affecting how included and reflected students feel in their learning environment
		- This is also related to language barrier issues
	+ A teacher raised how teachers themselves may be the biggest barriers, by not understanding their own biases and paying lip service to issues of equity without truly understanding how it relates to them
		- This was also raised in relation to consistency amongst teachers, and the negative impact inconsistency can have on students

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. 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. He then showed a slide illustrating the difference between equality, equity, and liberation, and posed the question of how the system can get to a place where all students are achieving at their highest potential. 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, and shared how as a father of three children and as someone who came out of hidden homelessness, the realities we face are close to his heart.

Tanya then provided some history and background on Aboriginal Education, emphasizing how First Nations, Inuit, and Metis students all attend TDSB schools. A Toronto Aboriginal Research Project in 2011 demonstrated that Toronto has the highest population of those three groups than 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 1000 (0.3%) self-identify as Indigenous.

She further emphasized 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.

Tanya then pointed to some specific points from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action for Canada that relate to education (refer to slide 12). 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 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 Marie Sinclair said, made possible through the use of education as the primary tool of education (refer to slide 14). 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 pitiful 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; pink for things happening now, and green 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. The high number of student voices contributed to a nuanced and lively conversation that generated many ideas during the activity. Participants were then asked to share any reflections or ideas that they came up with during the session. Some highlights included:

* A teacher shared that their school’s program providing healthy snacks was very positive, and that they have noticed a big difference in their students
* Another teacher shared an activity that their school started doing called “Bridges and Barriers”, which supports students in advocating and communicating for their needs
	+ This resulted in more direct feedback from students
	+ One thing that emerged from this work was learning that students highly value having an adult in the school who they feel comfortable talking to and can go to for support
	+ A student added that the more comfortable students feel in their space, the more they will share their opinions; it’s all about trust
	+ Another student built on to this reflection, sharing how in any school climate, getting to a shared understanding is indispensable
* One student shared how the timing of mental health month programming at their school actually added to their stress levels, due to its coincidence with a high-stress time (exams, thinking about their next year, thinking about post-secondary applications)
	+ They proposed spreading important conversations around mental health during the whole year, not just in one month, to better support students through their high-stress times
	+ Another student emphasized the importance of having a guidance counselor at every school, not for groups of schools, acknowledging that though it would be expensive it would be worth it

A full list of ideas appears at the end of the notes.

Margaret Douglin (TDSB Research) then presented 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 required, the hope is that each of the 580 schools will want to 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.

Margaret 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. 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.

A number of questions were raised by the group, particularly a concern over reporting a collective voice rather than capturing the individual voice. Liz responded that the Feedback Form was developed as a group tool by OISE called the Equity Continuum, with the goal of providing an overall baseline scan of how we are doing as a community. Individual voice is reflected in the TDSB census that was recently collected. Schools will be able to compare the two sets of data could to surface insights.

The group generally responded with a feeling that although the conversations should definitely happen, the wide range of varying perspectives and experiences may be lost in a collective process. One suggestion from a group member was to have a Comment Box for each question, but for data collection purposes it was requested that all comments be written in the one Comment Box provided. Another suggestion was to add a response option noting “Varied opinions” or “Range of thoughts” to account for different perspectives, which people could then expand upon in the Comment Box. Finally, it was requested that the date be amended to allow for some more time for these discussions to occur.

Summary of Collected Feedback on the process:

* Provide an option on the Feedback Form for mixed responses/disagreement
* Amend the due date of the Feedback Forms to allow for more time – July 15th was suggested

**Ideas generated in response to: What ideas do you have to create the conditions for well-being and achievement for every student?**

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| Classroom Climate and InstructionIdeas underway: * student work focused on significant people from all cultures- create posters to laminate and display
* engage students so that they see themselves relating
* varied cultural learning opportunities through the arts (i.e. dancing: hip-hop, African, Bollywood, and music)
* identify individual students' needs
* communication between the teacher and students is vital to the learning- not sure if teachers are listening enough to get student voice
* create a micro-society with a student government in which each student is a minister of the government, promoting student voice and student leadership
* learning commons open to all, all the time
* beginning stage of culturally relevant programming and teaching
* Inspiring Minds Community Ed
* One Voice One Team
* co-teaching in the grades
* mentoring partnerships
* high expectations for all students
* attend to the needs of kinesthetic learning and different learning styles when lessons are being planed
* make students feel safe
* look at census in depth to know who our students are
* showing interest that makes each student feel he/she is important
* student voice evident in school culture, activities
* culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy
* get rid of or ban cell phones during class
* positive feedback to students' homes about their progress/successes
* culturally relevant sources
* CRRP integrated into other subject areas- variety

Ideas being considered:* climate controlled safe comfortable
* teachers encouraging students to eat their lunch
* healthier lunch ideas
* teachers to ensure classroom prepared in advance (i.e. books, audio/visual equipment)
* smaller class sizes
* curriculum that is relevant to us all
* teachers recognizing our biases
* meet the needs of every individual student- special ed. or not
* establish a welcome committee for new students
* looking at P.OV our content covers
* more open/flexible entries into specialized programs
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| School ClimateIdeas underway: * school spirit
* community circles
* positive quotes throughout school
* involvement in board initiatives such as TDSB creates
* students are more stressed and more focused on getting high marks, and less focused on learning itself
* active parent involvement - make them feel welcome
* world on a plate
* visuals (artwork), positive role models
* family fit night
* active GSA
* positive/non-judging/welcoming teachers
* school and classroom should have same set of rules
* library open afterschool (teacher help, access, tech)
* multicultural club events
* daily newcomer community programs at lunch and after school
* information accessible in a variety of ways

Ideas being considered:* belong bench-students who want someone to connect with/talk to
* increased student enjoyment with a circle variety of extra-curricular and co-curricular activities/initiatives
* positive relationships and healthy, welcoming and inclusive environment are critical for learning to occur
* parents as partners
* empower new immigrants to lobby on behalf of their children and increase needed resources in the regular process
* variety of activities
* opportunities of access
* daily affirmations school wide
* student led initiatives
* cultural, religions, races of the world incorporated into curriculum
* lunchroom changes
* (Parklawn) snack program school council mixed income coming together building community
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| Student Voice and SpaceIdeas underway: * variety of activity options
* friend bench/playground pals: if a child is sitting on the bench, he/she needs a friend
* student surveys and other opportunities for input
* town hall meetings (KKSA)
* provide opportunities for student voice; see themselves represented in the curricular

 i.e debates* talk about their interests choosing one space
* provide opportunities for input in regards to what tasks they want to engage in-making it more student driven
* school inquiry into students, "How are you?", students do survey with parents, then school asks students, "How do we represent who we are"
* have students attend parent council meetings
* children's fundraising (Heart and Stroke Foundation)

Ideas being considered:* broaden student council- we need to widen how we represent a large student body and have fixed guidelines to follow to ensure success
* make every student feel like they belong on student council
* have students work more in their "House Families" (multiple grade groups)
* value student voices in various forms- provide opportunities in class, school, etc.
* student government- ambassadors/student UN
* more interactive learning, participation, and inquiry
* ask students for their input on a regular basis via forum, survey, lunch and learn, etc.
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| Family/Caregiver School RelationsIdeas underway: * the parenting + literacy, and settlement centers are valuable resources
* trying to bridge home school connections- S.T.E.M (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math)- inviting parents to see S.T.E.M program
* workshops to support families with nutrition
* communication between parents and students: all teachers using Google classroom
* school council
* workshops for parents; cooking, toilet training
* EQAO info night
* meet the teacher night

Ideas being considered:* a package prepares by TDSB for all new students at every level outlining all the opportunities that are available to them
* if entering in elementary, include everything all the way to high school
* difficulties dealing with a cashless system within TDSB schools when parents do not have bank accounts
* financial literacy for parents/students; community services fair
* Multi-lingual texts for parents
* lunch program
* provide more opportunities for parents/guardians to learn about the education system
* form strong community bonds between teachers and parents of high school students (keep them in the loop)
* every school should have enough space and budget for family resource center
* parent tours during the school day
* communicating to parents in their first language(s)
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| School LeadershipIdeas underway: * student Aboriginal Council (Murals, etc.)
* encouraging newcomer students to participate in leadership opportunities

Ideas being considered:* cultural awareness (student led activities promoting understanding and tolerance)
* more training in the needs of the particular school community
* a culture of belonging
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| Community ConnectionsIdeas underway: * weekly callout by Principal/Vice Principal
* culturally/gender relevant community partnerships.
* social justice (collecting donations for shelters)
* inviting community leaders to make presentations in our schools
* community support for mental health and wellbeing
* providing a wide range of communication channels
* visibility; daily face-to-face
* exercise to success: tve./open to ALL
* our partnership with police support, food bank, library, community centre

Ideas being considered:* invite local middle schools to collaborate with parent council of all schools to do year

end celebrations (Middle, Junior, and High school together) * extend parenting centre forward for parent/grandparent community
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| Culture of Professional DevelopmentIdeas underway: * teachers are released once a month for half a day
* bringing in and sharing of basic practices; looking at the data, 3-part math lessons, and use of manipulatives.
* provide more professional development and supports for parents
* build better school-community partnerships and opportunities
* board's/ministry's definition of success- Grade 9 EQAO math results
* PLC's
* as a board we do not have a common definition of success
* collaborative inquiry and courageous conversations
* education structure is based on post-secondary structure (marks)
* no equity where "poorer" schools/communities don't have or raise money to support student achievement and wellness

Ideas being considered:* more professional development for teacher's CPPP integration
* professional development from speakers who have experienced inequitable treatment in the educational system for the teachers
* mentoring/sharing of professional development that encourages teachers' risk taking on lesson delivery e.g. non English teachers using poetry to connect students
* meaningful professional development reflective of staff/students needs during the day
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