ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EQUITY

Thursday, September 26, 2019, 6:00 pm
Trustees' Committee Room
133 Greenbank Road
Ottawa, Ontario

Pages

8.1   Committee of the Whole

9.   New Business

10.   Adjournment

ADVISORY COMMITEE ON EQUITY

May 23, 2019
6:00 pm
Trustees' Committee Room
133 Greenbank Road
Ottawa, Ontario

Members: Elaine Hayles (Community Representative), Harvey Brown
                            (Community Representative), Ruth Sword (Spiritual Care in
                            Secondary Schools), Lisa Montroy (Family Services Ottawa),
                            Raigelee Alorut (Tungasuvvingat Inuit), Susan Cowin (Special
                            Education Advisory Committee, Alternate), Sonia Nadon-
                            Campbell (Special Education Advisory Committee), Ryan
                            Doucette (Young Leaders Advisory Council)
Non-Voting Members: Rob Campbell (Trustee), Chris Ellis (Trustee), Dorothy Baker
                            (Superintendent of Curriculum Services), Jacqueline Lawrence
                            (Equity and Diversity Coordinator), Milo Salem (Student Senator)
Staff and Guests: Donna Blackburn (Trustee), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent
                            of Learning Support Services), Petra Duschner (Manager of
                            Mental Health and Critical Services), David Sutton (OCDSB),
                            Ken Mak (OCDSB), Bob Dawson (Community Representative),
                            June Girvan (J'Nikira Dinqinesh Education Centre), Jean Goulet
                            (Spiritual Care in Secondary Schools), Maxine Adwella (National
                            Collaboration for Youth Mental Health), Nicole Guthrie
                            (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1.   Welcome

      Chair Hayles called the meeting to order at 6:28 p.m and acknowledged that the
      meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Territory and thanked the
      Algonquin Nation for hosting the meeting on their land.

2.   Approval of the Agenda

      Moved by Ruth Sword

      THAT the agenda be approved.

      Carried

3.   Community Voice (delegations)

      There were no delegations.

4. <u>Student Voice</u>

Indigenous Voice (Objibway)

- She noted that her high school has little programming or information to engage Indigenous students but the District's Indigenous Youth Symposium and some of the leadership initiatives it offers make her feel more welcomed. She noted that as a minority at her high school she feels that she stands out and that other students act differently around her;
- She expressed the view that it is essential for the District to provide resources and spaces for all cultures so that students feel comfortable. She noted that she often has to research on her own and it would be helpful if the school provided more information;
- She explained that another student had bullied her and the school administration did little to intervene, despite having brought the matter to their attention. She had to take time away from school to escape and begin to heal;
- She suggested that the ODCSB host presentations throughout the year to inform all students about Indigenous history to create an awareness and understanding;
- She requested that teachers be better educated in the presentation of Indigenous history and studies; and
- She advised that many students may not feel comfortable with providing accurate information to the identity based data collection initiative if it is not anonymous.

Transgender Voice, Female to Male, he/him pronouns

- He noted that before entering high school, he had no Trans experience and little contact with the 2SLGBTTQ+ community. In high school he met numerous students at school and through the Rainbow Youth Forum and was able to begin to come to terms with his feelings to help shape and fully express himself;
- He highlighted the importance of having 2SLGBTTQ+ history and information included in the curriculum. He noted that many Trans students are forced to get their information online and that there is a lot of misinformation. He noted that it would be safer and more comfortable for students to get that information at school. He encouraged staff to provide training to teachers on transsexual health as it is an area most trans students struggle with;
- He suggested that schools encourage the use of they/them pronouns and use more non-gender language. He noted that this small change would help foster feelings of inclusion;
- He indicated that gay and Trans are not the same things and that even within the 2SLGBTTQ+ community, he often feels excluded. He suggested the

District host a trans-specific event and expressed his interest in being an event organizer;

- He advised that the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) has an excellent gender clinic that has therapists and doctors supporting trans children and youth;
- He shared that the Rainbow Youth Forum provides 2SLGBTTQ+ students with a safe place to explore the issues students experience at school. He noted that his current school is a welcoming place and the staff have a great understanding of his identity and work to make him and his peers more comfortable;
- He recalled a difficult experience at her first high school. He expressed the view that the school was unwelcoming and unsafe, and the teachers and administrators did little to help him and his peers even after a violent incident. He and his peers had to move about the school in packs to feel safe. He had to transfer to another school where he was warmly welcomed and supported;
- He expressed concern about participating in the identity based data collection online. He noted that students are cautious about what they do online at school for fear others are looking over their shoulders. He suggested a voting box or private booth format where paper forms could be completed in private;
- He shared that he was once locked in a gender-neutral washroom and described the uncomfortable nature of using and accessing these washrooms. He noted that accommodations such as gender-neutral washrooms end up singling students out and often other students use the spaces to vape or make-out as they are single stall and the door can be locked. Trans students are often anxious about washroom use owing to the lack of availability and the safety issues of using their preferred washroom. He suggested the use of an "I'll go with you" system, whereby other students wear an identifier to indicate their willingness to help support trans peers; and
- Ron advised that Trans is not strictly an adult topic. He suggested that educators and administrators need to be more informed of the broad terms and language of the 2SLGBTTQ+ community and that courses must including their history. He noted that is difficult to find Trans history and would like to find himself represented in the lessons within the classroom.

Black and Muslim Voice

- He noted is while his high school is a multi-cultural school, he still feels he is a visible minority within his school as a black Muslim man;
- He expressed the importance of representation and diversity at the staff level. He indicated he would feel more empowered if he could see himself in his teachers, support staff and administrators. He highlighted his immense respect and admiration for his Principal. He noted that as a black woman in a place of authority, she can often empathize and has a real understanding of the types of issues he faces both at school and within the community;

- He advised that OCDSB schools need more conduits, programs and activities to support and engage Black students. He warned that when his peers do not have these outlets, they feel closed off and disengaged in school and community. He highlighted the continued support and persistence of a teacher who saw his potential and engaged him in a variety of school initiatives which helped him to take risks and brought him to the Black Youth Forum. Amar noted that he now works as a leader in his school to empower fellow and future students;
- He highlighted his recent involvement in his school's "Seeing in Colour" campaign to help raise awareness of the stigma of Black and Diasporic students in the 2SLGBTTQ+ community. He noted that small campaigns help create a spirit of equity and make everyone feel welcome;
- He stressed the importance of seeing himself in future career opportunities. He advised that Black students need to hear the stories of Black lawyers, scientists, doctors, and business leaders. The Black Youth forum provides this opportunity for Black students, and he would like to see more opportunities like these across the District;
- He spoke of the importance of inclusivity in education. He noted that the histories of many of his peers are mere side topics and if they were highlighted it could help broaden understanding; and
- He spoke of the micro aggressions he experiences as a Black student and that they help perpetuate the division and attitudes.

All three students agreed that OCDSB teachers and administrators should always be willing to ask, be curious, never assume and ask for pronouns and other information about their identities.

5. Review of Advisory Committee on Equity Report

   5.1 25 April 2019

   Moved by Ruth Sword,

   THAT the ACE Report of 25 April 2019 be received.

   Mr. Dawson requested that his name be added to the list of attendees.

   Moved by Ruth Sword,

   THAT the ACE Report of 25 April 2019 be received, as amended

   Carried

   In response to a query from Ms. Alorut, Superintendent Baker advised that information on Indigenous events and resources is shared with senior staff, administrators and trustees. She indicated that a monthly bulletin is shared with the Indigenous Education Advisory Council and could also be shared with ACE.

5.2   Review of Long Range Agenda

The long range agenda was provided for information.

5.3   Motion/Action Tracking Report, Business Arising

The motion/action tracking report was provided for information.

6.   Action/Discussion/Information Items

6.1   Report 19-053, Report on the 2019-2023 Draft Strategic Plan

Your committee had before it Report 19-053, seeking feedback on the draft 2019-2023 Strategic Plan.

During the discussion and in response to questions, the following points were noted:

- Mr. Dawson complimented the staff on the draft strategic plan and stated he was impressed with the project. He queried whether or not there will be more context provided. Executive Officer Giroux advised that the letter of transmittal that accompanies the draft strategic plan contains more detailed information, background, and context. When the draft strategic plan is presented to the Board in June, further information from the consultation will be included. She noted that the data and input from the Thoughtexchange process, available on the District website, is another source for background information;
- In response to a query from Mr. Weaver regarding the focus on mathematics, staff noted that the Annual Student Achievement Report (ASAR) documents overall student achievement through a comparison of EQAO measures as well as District compiled data to the provincial average. The District undertakes focused monitoring of specific groups of students that may experience barriers to learning. These groups are boys, English language learners (ELL), students with special education needs, students who self-identify as Indigenous, and students residing in lower-income neighbourhoods (SES). The examination of results for each of these groups of students relative to all students can expose achievement gaps. The identity based data collection project the District has undertaken will allow for further layers to the ASAR. Staff noted that mathematics is identified specifically in the draft 2019-2023 Strategic Plan as a result of feedback from the community. During the feedback process, staff have heard that literacy should also be an area of focus;
- The District aims to mitigate the dis-proportionality in achievement by removing barriers to success for students. The first goal listed within the culture of innovation is "set high expectations for all student in all programs";

- Mr. Sutton recommended that key performance indicators for staff include a reference to staff diversity;
- Ms. Girvan queried how the draft 2019-2023 Strategic Plan honours the District's commitment to recognizing the United Nations Decade for people of African descent. Staff noted that within the culture of caring, the District intends to build capacity to support historically marginalized groups. Staff and trustees wished to be inclusive with the language. Staff expressed confidence in the draft 2019-2023 Strategic Plan and its ability to respond to the elements of the motion in support of the decade for people of African descent. The draft 2019-2023 Strategic Plan is intended to drive a culture of innovation, a culture of caring, and a culture of social responsibility with intentional impact on students, staff and the system;
- Ms. Girvan queried how ACE and the community hold the Board accountable to its commitment to the United Nations Decade for people of African descent. Staff will review the declaration further. The culture of social responsibility and modeling ethical leadership and equitable practice help ensure that the District is fostering good stewardship. The Board must follow up and monitor the strategic plan within the measurement framework;
- Ms. Adwella recommended the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan include a reference to race, culture and gender; and
- Mr. Doucette expressed concern that issues of privacy may impact the identity based data collection, as evidenced in the comments made by the students during their presentations within item 4. He noted that it would be necessary for the District to communicate the message that the intent is not to stigmatize communities but to acquire objective information to improve student outcomes.

6.2   Memo 19-072, Draft Mental Health Strategy

Your committee had before it Memo 19-072, Draft Mental Health Strategy Class locations, providing information regarding changes to specialized program

During discussion, and in response to questions the following points were noted:

- Ms.Nadon-Campbell queried whether or not the strategy references students with special education needs. Staff noted that the District will explore best practices in supporting the mental health needs concurrent with student special education needs and that staff agree that these students often require a different level of mental health support;
- Ms. Adwella expressed concern about the timing of the discussion and noted that the draft mental health strategy requires further discussion

by the committee. She expressed the view that the strategy was too general and requested that the strategy identify specific mental health strategies based on culture, race and gender. She commented that youth mental health must be reflective of the diverse population;

- Superintendent Symmonds requested that comments and feedback be forwarded to Diversity Coordinator Lawrence. The collective feedback will be shared with the Mental Health Team;
- Ms. Girvan noted that students spoke of environmentally induced mental ill-health. She expressed the view that much of the students energy and time is devoted to mental survival and the problem is systemic;
- Chair Hayles noted that the item would be added to the September 2019 agenda for further discussion.

6.3 Launch of the ACE Membership Campaign

Diversity Coordinator Lawrence advised that per the suggestion of the committee the ACE membership campaign will launch on 28 May and remain open until 28 August 2019 to ensure that all communities have an opportunity to engage with the campaign material and have time to submit applications. The members were engaged to collect a poster and the invitation letter and distribute within their communities. She noted that the District will also be utilizing a variety of media sources to promote the campaign.

6.4 Draft ACE Annual Report

Diversity Coordinator Lawrence advised that she will be sending out the draft ACE Annual Report to the members for comment. She encouraged the members to provide her with suggestions on the document.

7. Department Update

There was no department update.

8. Committee Reports

8.1 Committee of the Whole

There was no report from the Committee of the Whole.

9. New Business

Ms. Nadon-Campbell advised that the Odawa Native Friendship Centre will host its annual Pow Wow on 25 and 26 May 2019 at 200 Moodie Drive and invited members to attend.

Ms. Girvan June advised that plans are underway to have Ottawa declared a Child Friendly City. She noted that the City of Ottawa will celebrate the 30th

anniversary of the United Nations Universal Children's Day on 20 November 2019.

10. <u>Adjournment</u>

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

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Elaine Hayles, Chair, Advisory Committee on Equity

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EQUITY

Long Range Agenda
2019-2020

1. Appointment of representative and alternate to Committee of the Whole (September/October)
2. ACE proposed 2019-20 priorities (September/October/November)
3. Location of Meetings (October/November)
4. Equity Action Plan (October/November)
5. Identity Based Data Collection (November/December)
6. Equity Professional Development (October/Ongoing)
7. ACE input into the 2020-2021 Budget (January/February 2020)
8. Equity Lens on Consultation (TBD)
9. OCDSB process to address suspension with anecdotal evidence (TBD)

Motion and Action Tracker

Meeting Date	Motion/Actions	Responsibility	Follow up/Action	Status	Completed
March 2019	**Original Motion:** THAT the Board explore funding to support mental health through an equity lens especially for students who self identify as First Nations, Inuit and Metis and for male students of African descent. COW 16 Aril – Revised Motion A. **THAT the Board direct staff to explore and report on funding to support mental health through an equity lens, especially for students who self-identify as First Nations, Métis, Inuit and for male students of African descent, as amended.** B. **THAT the Board direct staff to evaluate, through an equity lens, barriers to access mental health services within the**	D. Baker	Staff directed to explore what is available for First Nations, Inuit and Met's and male students of African descent. Concerns reflected in Mental Health Strategy Intentional collaboration between Equity, Indigenous and Learning Support Services to identify and address issues. Exploring possibility of a metal health youth symposium in 2020		

Meeting Date	Motion/Actions	Responsibility	Follow up/Action	Status	Completed
	OCDSB, especially for students who self identify as First Nations, Métis, Inuit and for male students of African descent, as amended.				
September 2018	Equity Lens on Consultation	J. Lawrence	TBC		
	Follow up regarding how the Board can investigate antidotal evidence that indicate high suspension rates of black students	D. Baker J. Oracheski	TBC		
	Community stories	ACE members			
	Organizational Chart	D. Baker			
May 2018	Listening and building capacity	Jacqueline Lawrence	Long range planning		
	Panel discussion with teachers to share their lived experiences	Jacqueline Lawrence	Long range planning		
April 2018	OCDSB Hiring Practices to build a representative workforce	Jacqueline Lawrence	Invitation to Human Resources Superintendent for 2018-2019 meeting		
September 2017	Update on Report 17-074, Eastern Area Accommodation Review: Proposed Plan to Monitor Impact on Student Achievement and Well-being	Superintendent Baker	We can follow up to see which principal may wish to join us to share the experiences of the students to date		
	Indigenous Education Advisory Council	Superintendent Baker	Updated information provided in October meeting and Policy came to ACE for consultation in May 2018		Completed

Meeting Date	Motion/Actions	Responsibility	Follow up/Action	Status	Completed
	OCDSB hiring page missing OCDSB's commitment to building a representative workforce	Jacqueline Lawrence	Discussed with Superintendent of Human Resources and worked with HR team and communications to include equity statement in addition to tag line on job notices		Completed
April 2017	**That the Ottawa Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), undertake a qualitative study to collect data on students, parents, staff and other stakeholders' experiences of racism in the OCDSB, which will become part of the evidence-base for addressing racism.**	Superintendent Baker	Shared information with senior team	Student voice shared in May 2018 Date with Diversity OCDSB hosted its 1st Black Youth Conference in May 2018 to provide spaces for black youth to share their lived experiences. Collation of stories will be shared in the coming months. Data collection process will include community voice to gather qualitative information.	
March 2017	Educators' DEI Knowledge capacity to address world issues in classrooms	Jacqueline Lawrence	Long range planning		

| Meeting Date	Motion/Actions	Responsibility	Follow up/Action	Status	Completed
September 2016	Equity Lens on Data Collection to support Graduation rates	Jacqueline Lawrence	Shared information with Research Team who then attended ACE meeting to discuss Achievement Report results	On=going	
May 2016	Motion for Expanded Disaggregated Data **ACE recommends that data be collected and disaggregated to include racialized backgrounds to better understand and to ensure the supports are in place for students who could potentially disengage and subsequently leave school early, be suspended or expelled**	D. Baker	Discuss with Senior Team	Superintendent Baker provided update on forthcoming Ministry report which would help to inform Ministry directions in response to the conversations taking place across the province.	
		Harvey Brown	Shared with Trustees in Ace's annual report	On-going	
September 2015	Equity Lens on Data Collection to understand demographics of early school leavers	J. Lawrence	Research team invited to meet with ACE's Research Committee	On-going	

Ottawa-Carleton
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES TOGETHER

2019 – 2023 STRATEGIC PLAN

"Education must not simply teach work — it must teach life."

— W.E.B. Du Bois
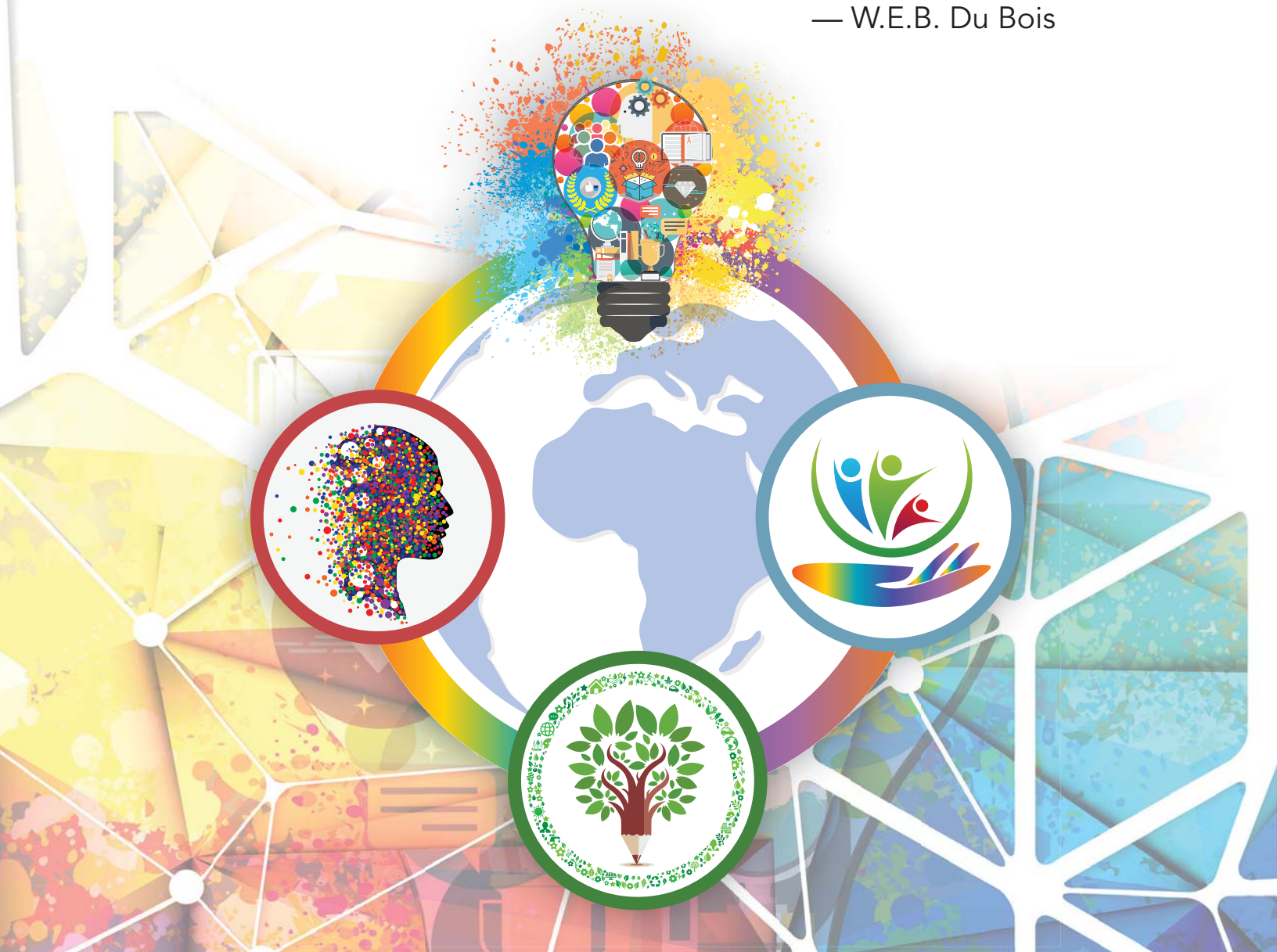
We acknowledge that our District is on unceded and unsurrendered Algonquin Territory, and we thank the Algonquin Nation for hosting us and recognize their enduring presence on this land.

Strategic Plan 2019–2023

Creating a culture of Innovation, Caring and Social Responsibility…

means ensuring our schools are welcoming places for all students and staff to engage, belong, learn, grow, explore and discover. From Kindergarten to Grade 12, our focus is to support student learning and well-being so that all students can develop the characteristics and skills they need to find success in the world. Our Exit Outcomes describe what we want for all of our learners.

With this in mind, our new strategic plan seeks to develop these characteristics and skills.

Educating for Success — Inspiring Learning, Developing Well-Being and Building Social Responsibility

Our goal was to create a simple, measurable and impactful plan that is meaningful to students, staff and community members. Recognizing that learning, well-being and equity are the core of our work, our strategic plan is focused on building a culture that supports and engages students, staff and community. This is achieved by ensuring our schools are safe, caring and respectful. We need to look forward and think about how our world is changing and ensure we are ready to respond to that change. With this in mind, we are excited that our new strategic plan has three key objectives — to create a Culture of Innovation, a Culture of Caring, and a Culture of Social Responsibility.

To drive this cultural shift, we have established three goals for each objective – one with a student focus, one with a staff focus and one with a system focus. These goals are supported by strategies that will guide our work; outcomes that describe the change we want to happen; and key performance indicators that will help us to measure our progress.

Culture of Innovation
We will build a learning community where innovation and inquiry drive learning.

Our Goals:

Champion high learning expectations for all students in all programs.

Promote collaborative environments which foster innovation and creativity.

Modernize instruction and administrative processes.

Culture of Caring
We will advance equity and a sense of belonging to promote a safe and caring community.

Our Goals:

Prioritize the dignity and well-being of students in inclusive and caring classrooms.

Champion and nurture a safe, caring and respectful workplace.

Build authentic engagement with and among our communities.

Culture of Social Responsibility
We will strengthen our community through ethical leadership, equitable practice, and responsible stewardship.

Our Goals:

Remove barriers to equity of access, opportunity, and outcomes.

Model responsible and ethical leadership and accountability.

Foster progressive stewardship of the environment, and human and financial resources.

SKILLS

CRITICAL THINKERS
Students who are critical thinkers engage in reflective and independent thinking. They identify the relevance, validity and importance of ideas using rational and intuitive processes. They understand the logical connections between ideas. They construct and evaluate arguments using criteria. They generate solutions and create new ways of thinking.

ACADEMICALLY DIVERSE
Students who are academically diverse have strong literacy and numeracy skills; they will also have acquired a full spectrum of skills through exposure to a wide range of subjects including the arts, sciences, financial literacy, physical education, the trades and technology, in keeping with student needs.

DIGITALLY FLUENT
Students who are digitally fluent know how to engage with technology to enhance their learning; this includes interacting with, creating and sharing information (individually or collaboratively) in a responsible and ethical way to support their learning.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATORS
Students who are effective communicators are skilled at listening, speaking, questioning, and writing; they connect with people and know their audience.

ETHICAL DECISION-MAKERS
Students who are ethical decision makers model principles that govern their decisions through their actions. They embody honesty, respect and responsibility.

CHARACTERISTICS

GOAL-ORIENTED
Students who are goal-oriented have self-motivation, diligence, initiative and a sense of responsibility.

RESILIENT
Students who are resilient face and overcome adversity and challenging situations. They take risks, learn from mistakes, persevere, and move forward confidently.

GLOBALLY AWARE
Students who are globally aware are empathetic and responsive in their contributions to the local and global community. They demonstrate cultural proficiency and act in a respectful, inclusive manner.

COLLABORATIVE
Students who are collaborative understand the importance of working cooperatively in a team setting. Collaboration values diverse perspectives and effectively utilizes each person's contributions.

INNOVATIVE/CREATIVE
Students who are innovative and creative have original thoughts and ideas that are of value and are acted upon. They understand that creativity is essential not only for solving problems, but also for improving where strengths already exist.

Culture of Caring

We will advance equity and a sense of belonging to promote a safe and caring community.

OUR GOALS:

- Prioritize the dignity and well-being of students in inclusive and caring classrooms;
- Champion and nurture a safe, caring and respectful workplace; and
- Build authentic engagement with and among our communities.

STRATEGIES:

- Build system capacity in equity and inclusive practice to support education, engagement and reconciliation with historically marginalized groups;
- Provide learning opportunities and resources to support student well-being;
- Foster conditions to improve workplace safety and employee well-being;
- Enhance communications and develop mechanisms to build employee engagement; and
- Build system capacity to support parent and family engagement at the classroom, school and district levels.

DESIRED OUTCOMES:

For Students
- Improved equity of access, opportunity and outcomes;
- Improved student well-being;
- Enhanced student safety;

For Staff
- Improved employee well-being;
- Improved employee engagement;

For System
- Increased parent voice;
- Increased community partnerships; and
- More representative workforce.

Culture of Innovation

We will build a learning community where innovation and inquiry drive learning.

OUR GOALS:

- Champion high learning expectations for all students in all programs;
- Promote collaborative environments which foster innovation and creativity; and
- Modernize instruction and administrative processes.

STRATEGIES:

- Establish targets for student achievement;
- Provide professional learning and tools to support quality instruction and collaboration;
- Create conditions to support creativity, innovation and evidence-based practice;
- Modernize learning and enhance student experience; and
- Optimize resources and technology to modernize business processes.

DESIRED OUTCOMES:

For Students
- Improved student achievement;
- Increased graduation success in all pathways;
- Increased sense of relevance and motivation for students;

For Staff
- Increased capacity to support personalization of learning;
- Increased leadership capacity; and

For System
- Improved business processes and efficiency.

How are we going to move this work forward?

The Strategic Plan sets a course for the next four (4) years. Annually, the Board adopts a workplan which establishes key dates for monitoring fiduciary responsibilities and progress on strategic priorities. The Director generates annual strategic action plans which lay out the key work, deliverables, timelines and anticipated progress on the strategic objectives. Expectations for student achievement are established in the Board Improvement Plan and schools set their annual goals based on these expectations in the School Learning Plan. The Departmental work-plans are companion pieces to the Strategic Action Plan and are developed to reflect how departmental initiatives, programs and the operational activities will be directed by the Strategic Plan objectives.

How will we monitor progress?
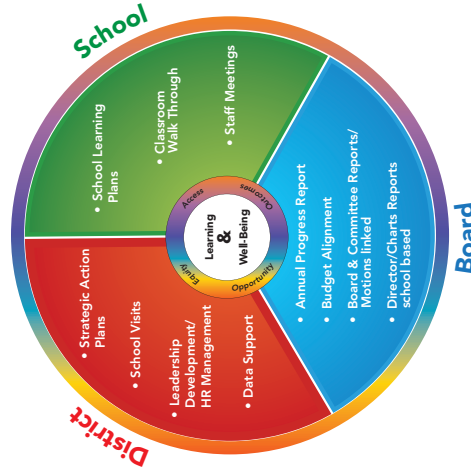
As a system, we have to monitor progress in the classroom, at the school level, at the District level and in the Boardroom. This creates a cycle of accountability. Some sample questions to guide our monitoring include:

1. Is there evidence of these priorities in schools, classrooms, and workplaces?
2. Is decision-making guided by the strategic priorities?
3. Are we creating conditions to promote a change in culture?
4. Do we see a disproportionate representation of students in programs, classrooms, and success/recognition activities?
5. How does the data/evidence inform our work?

Culture of Social Responsibility

We will strengthen our community through ethical leadership, equitable practice, and responsible stewardship.

OUR GOALS:
- Remove barriers to equity of access, opportunity, and outcomes;
- Model responsive and ethical leadership and accountability; and
- Foster progressive stewardship of the environment, and human and financial resources.

DESIRED OUTCOMES:

For Students
- Improved social and emotional skills;
- Increased student voice;
- Improved student behaviour;
- Reduced disproportionate representation;

For Staff
- Improved leadership capacity;
- Improved employee engagement and recognition;

For System
- Improved decision-making;
- Improved governance practices; and
- Improved environmental practice and reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

STRATEGIES:
- Support and encourage the development of our Exit Outcomes and life skills in all students;
- Build leadership capacity and succession plans;
- Build system capacity in environmental stewardship, resource allocation and risk management; and
- Collect and use data to inform instructional practice, policy, and decision making.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Key Performance Indicators are used to measure change. The following KPIs include a mix of current data sources as well as some new data sources. For example, measuring student, staff, and parent experiences will require the collection of perceptual data. This type of data is an essential element of any strategy which seeks to effect change in culture.

The District currently collects and reports on student achievement data. Our capacity to differentiate data by group will expand with the collection of identity-based data. This includes the ability to generate disproportionality indices as a measure of progress in removing barriers and improving equity of access, opportunity, and outcome.

The KPI's will be reported on annually in a series of reports — one report on each of the three strategic objectives and in the Annual Student Achievement Report. This data provides the strategic overview necessary to support the Board's accountability.

Culture of Innovation
We will build a learning community where innovation and inquiry drive learning.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Graduation Rate
- Annual Certification Rate
- EQAO Results
- Achievement Gaps
- Parent, Student, Staff Experience (Annual survey data)

Culture of Caring
We will advance equity and a sense of belonging to promote a safe and caring community.

Key Performance Indicators:

- School climate (sense of belonging, bullying incidents, suspensions & exclusions)
- Employee engagement (absenteeism, respectful workplace incidents, workplace injuries, satisfaction)
- Student engagement (attendance, student voice)
- Parent engagement (participation, parent voice, representation)

Culture of Social Responsibility
We will strengthen our community through ethical leadership, equitable practice, and responsible stewardship.

Key Performance Indicators:

- Social Emotional Skills (OECD study data)
- Leadership Diversity
- Disproportionality indices
- Environmental Stewardship (GHG emissions rate)

INTRODUCTION

At the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB), we understand that mental health and well-being are fundamental to student success and affect academic achievement as well as social and emotional development.

The OCDSB Mental Health Strategy (2019–2022) builds on the previous strategy. It is informed by provincial and local data and OCDSB staff, student and parent voices. The Mental Health Strategy continues to focus on building and sustaining mentally healthy schools through capacity building for staff, meaningful youth and parent engagement, and collaboration with community partners following an evidence-based, tiered approach to intervention to support students. The Strategy aligns with the OCDSB 2019–2023 Strategic Plan in its commitment to building and sustaining safe, caring, inclusive classrooms where diversity is recognized, respected and celebrated, and where every student knows they matter and feels they belong.

The priority areas identified by School Mental Health Ontario include: organizational conditions, capacity building, evidence-based mental health promotion and prevention, specific populations, system coordination and youth engagement. These priority areas are embedded in the OCDSB Strategic Plan's Culture of Innovation, Culture of Caring and Culture of Social Responsibility.

UNDERSTANDING MENTAL HEALTH

The concept of mental health is perceived and understood differently across cultures. In some cultures, mental health is considered living a good life. In others, it is linked with physical health, while in others there is no equivalent language for mental health. For the purpose of this Strategy, we will use the World Health Organization's definition, where mental health is described as: "A state of well-being in which every individual realizes their potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to their community". The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) adds that: "Mental health is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity social justice, interconnections, and personal dignity" (PHAC 2006). In other words, mental health is about being able to enjoy life in a meaningful way, to flourish and thrive, and to cope with challenges when they arise. Mental health is a **positive** concept.

Mental health is influenced by a combination of biological (genetic factors) and life experiences. These life experiences, known as social determinants of health, impact mental health as **protective or risk factors**. Academic success/achievement, safe housing, supportive relationships, sense of belonging, opportunities for meaningful engagement and healthy coping skills are examples of **protective factors**, while social exclusion, trauma (including intergenerational trauma), poverty, disability, unemployment, historic and systemic marginalization for example, are **risk factors**, which can lead to higher rates of mental health challenges. It is also important to consider mental health and mental illness as two separate, but interconnected, concepts. For example, people with diagnosed mental illness (e.g., depression, schizophrenia, anxiety) can enjoy good mental health by managing their symptoms, leading a productive life including forming positive relationships with others. Similarly, people without a diagnosed mental illness may be dealing with poor mental health if they are struggling to manage their emotions, feeling isolated or disengaged, and have limited coping strategies.

APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING AT SCHOOL

Schools are ideal settings to promote mental health & well-being. Not only can educators provide an engaging, caring and inclusive classroom environment to foster a sense of belonging, support the development of social emotional skills, but educators can also notice when students are experiencing difficulty and facilitate access to care.

What students need to build and sustain mental health is reflected in the model developed for the School Mental Health Ontario (formerly School Mental Health ASSIST) 2019: Action Plan. The model below illustrates the importance of setting <u>caring conditions for learning</u>. This is achieved by creating welcoming classrooms where diversity is recognized and respected. Students see themselves reflected in their environment and in the curriculum. Through this, students know they matter and have a sense of belonging. Educators support students to develop <u>social emotional learning skills</u> (e.g. self-awareness, self-regulation, positive relationships (social skills), problem solving, resilience, and to learn about <u>mental health</u>). The model also illustrates that students need educators who have the knowledge and skills to notice signs of emotional difficulty and to access appropriate MH Supports and Services. Clear, <u>strong culturally appropriate pathways</u> to, from and through care in the community need to be understood and information needs to be available to parents/caregivers. This work is done with a focus on equity, as we continue to deepen our understanding of identity in supporting mental health.
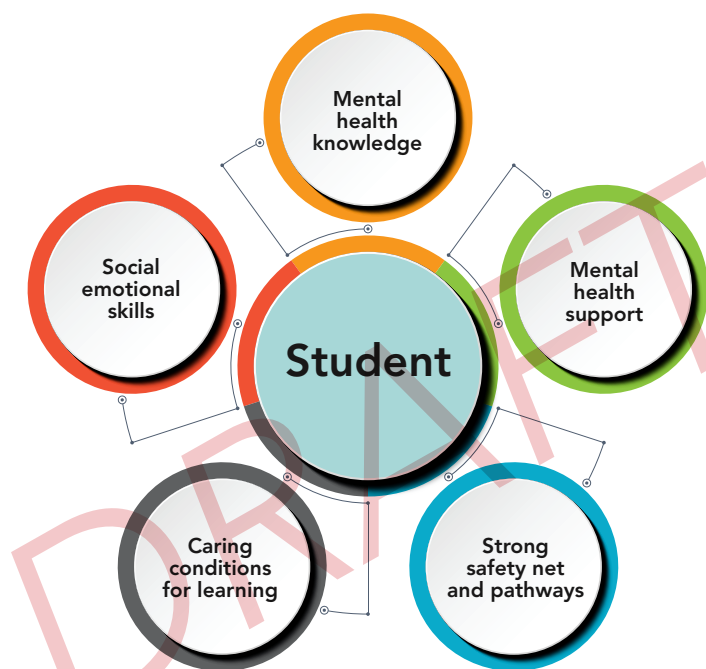
* Adapted from School Mental Health Ontario Model (2019)

At the OCDSB, we provide a continuum of supports and services, following a tiered approach to intervention. This aligned and integrated model (AIM), developed by School Mental Health Ontario, ensures that students have access to the right level of support at the right time from the right service provider. The foundation focuses on universal mental health promotion that is good for all students. When educators **create** a welcoming environment, **include** student voice and leadership in the classroom, **promote** mental health and wellbeing, **understand** the factors that impact mental health, **know** their students and their students' needs, and **partner** with families and communities, students will feel safe, cared for, and included.

Some students will need additional, more targeted support to be successful in their learning and their social relationships. Educators can play an important role in early identification by recognizing signs of emotional difficulty. Skill building in areas such as resiliency, self-regulation, social relationships, and self-esteem, as well as accommodations (as needed) help to prevent further challenges.

A few students will require intensive mental health or crisis intervention and supports. In addition to school-based supports, such as psychologists and social workers, access to community resources may be important for these students.

Source: *School Mental Health Ontario

Aligned and Integration Model (AIM) for
School Mental Health and Well-Being
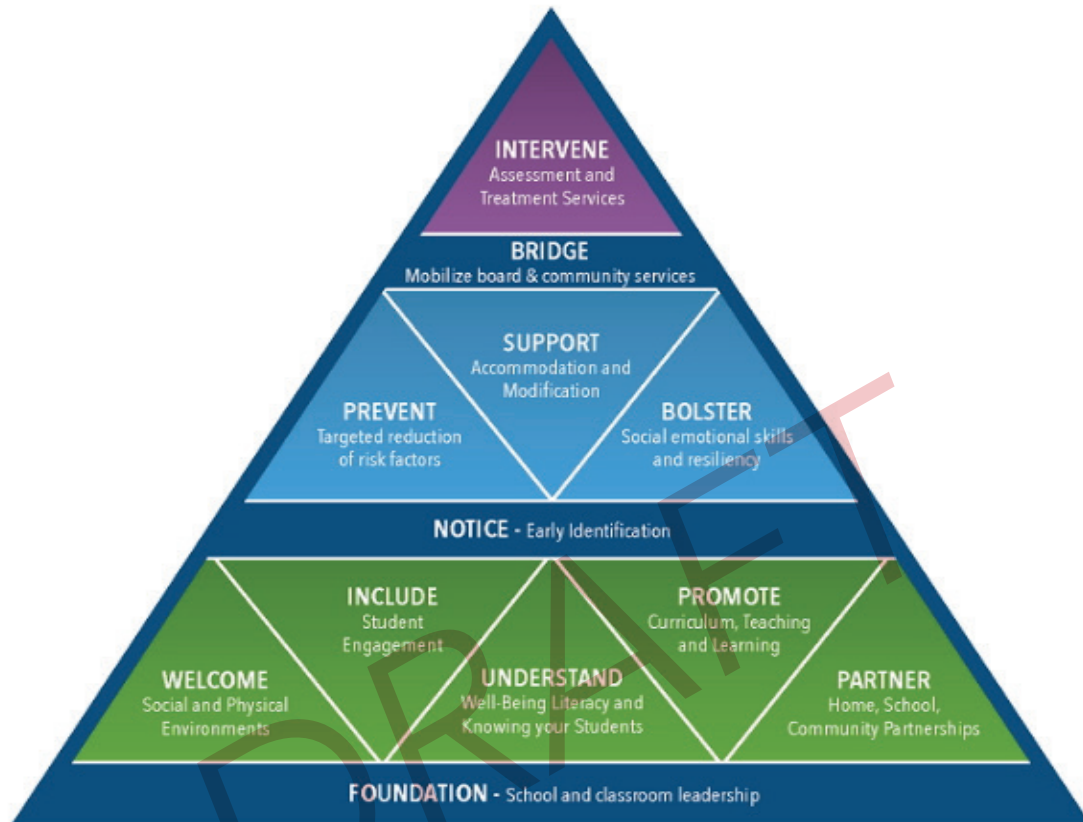
VISION

Engaging, educating and empowering our students, staff and communities, and providing a safe, caring and inclusive learning environment that promotes student mental health, well-being and achievement.

VALUES:

At the OCDSB we value:

- Equitable and inclusive education to foster a sense of belonging
- Student voice to inform and guide our work
- Collaboration with our families in support of their children's mental health
- Our community partnerships
- Evidence-based and evidence informed approaches
- The vital role our staff play in promoting and supporting student mental health; and we are committed to deepening their knowledge, understanding and capacity to support all students while also recognizing and supporting staff well-being

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2019–2022:
CULTURE OF INNOVATION

Organizational conditions set the foundation to foster innovative approaches for evidence-based/informed, culturally relevant, and sustainable mental health practices in our classrooms and our schools.

STRATEGIES

- **Shared Language:**
  - » Continue to develop a shared understanding of factors, including identity, that influence mental health and the relationship between mental health, well-being and achievement
  - » Reinforce the use of non-discriminatory language that reflects respect and acceptance
  - » Communicate information related to mental health promotion in language that engages our diverse communities
- **Standard Processes:**
  - » Ensure clear descriptions of roles and services within schools
  - » Create and/or revise protocols related to identifying and supporting student mental health needs that include culturally responsive approaches
  - » Ensure that all staff know and follow the Board's suicide prevention, intervention and post-intervention protocol
- **Continuous Quality Improvement:**
  - » Identify success indicators to monitor progress and measure impact
  - » Use data to inform school improvement plans (well-being) and mental health action plans

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Students:
- Increased understanding of the difference between mental health and mental illness, and reduced stigma;
- Increased use of language that reflects inclusivity; and
- Clear understanding of the process to access support.

Staff:
- Enhanced sense of belonging, mental health and well-being through the use and reinforcement of non-discriminatory language;
- Embraced responsibility in supporting student mental health and well-being; and
- Understand and access the process to provide differentiated levels of support.

System:
- Increased understanding of all staff roles and responsibilities, processes and procedures in supporting student mental health & well-being in a culturally responsive manner;
- Clear understanding of protocols and pathways to care across all schools; and
- Evidence-informed quality improvements in mental health and well-being.

CULTURE OF CARING

To support a culture of caring, systematic and focused training is needed to help ensure that our staff, families and students have the knowledge they need to understand the factors that impact mental health and the resources to access a range of services to support the needs of students. This is achieved using evidence-based/informed, culturally responsive approaches that acknowledge the diversity and lived experience of our students and their families.

STRATEGIES

Staff:

- Build capacity across all OCDSB staff in equity and inclusive practice;
- Expand learning with administrators on creating and sustaining mentally healthy, inclusive schools;
- Together with Staff Wellness, promote staff well-being by sharing information related to personal resilience;
- Provide mental health literacy through professional development for all educator groups (Supporting Minds) and additional training for guidance counsellors and student success teachers;
- Provide opportunities for mental health expertise training for professional staff (Psychology & Social Work staff) on topics related to supporting the mental health of students with specific lived experiences and culturally responsive, evidence based intervention approaches;
- Continue to implement evidence-based programs including: Mindmasters2, Zones of Regulation, Collaborative Problem Solving, Kids Have Stress Too;
- Continue suicide prevention training using safeTALK and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) aligned with crisis prevention, intervention, postvention procedure;
- Continue training staff in Violence/Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA); and
- Seek opportunities to pilot and evaluate promising new practices and programs in collaboration with our community partners.

Parents:

- Provide presentations on mental health awareness (promoting mental health & well-being) and specific topics (e.g., stress and anxiety) for parents; and
- Explore authentic and meaningful engagement with our parent community to better understand our communities and reduce barriers to accessing mental health services with particular consideration for specific populations.

Students:

- Self-Identification will inform specific strategies;
- Together with Program & Learning support student learning in mental health through the Health & Physical Education curriculum;
- Establish a youth advisory on mental health to help identify areas of focus, and co-create mental health awareness activities and programs for youth;
- Together with Ottawa Public Health, implement *Youth Connections Ottawa*, a peer to peer wellness program in secondary schools; and
- Explore ways to engage elementary students in mental health awareness and promotion initiatives.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Students

- Increased sense of belonging, positive relationships, and overall well-being;
- Improved social emotional skills and increased use of positive coping strategies; and
- Increased capacity to act with compassion, empathy and kindness towards others.

Staff

- Increased awareness and understanding of the factors (including identity) that impact mental health of our diverse populations;
- Increased capacity to promote mental health and well-being through caring and inclusive practices and evidence based programming; and
- Improved staff well-being.

System

- Increased knowledge and skill in supporting mental health, identifying and facilitating access to care across all schools; and
- Increased parental voice, knowledge and family engagement.

CULTURE OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Student mental health & well-being is a shared responsibility between home, school and community. Working with families and community partners to enhance supports to all students and facilitate access to community resources will help reduce barriers to accessing services, and ensure students are provided with the right service at the right time.

STRATEGIES

- Expand opportunities to collaborate with community partners to support mental health needs of Newcomers, immigrants, 2SLGBTQ+, racialized and Indigenous youth;
- Explore and expand best practices in supporting the mental health needs concurrent with student special education needs;
- Together with CAS, support students in care through the Joint Protocol for Student Achievement *(JPSA);*
- Explore best practices, together with community partners, in engaging chronically non-attending students;
- Collaborate with Rideauwood Addiction Services to ensure quality prevention and intervention services for students with substance use/abuse issues;
- Continue collaboration with Ottawa's Lead Mental Health Agency (Youth Services Bureau) to identify and address service gaps in the community;
- Expand school-based community partnerships through central partnership process; and
- Explore opportunities to enhance meaningful family engagement.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Students

- Increased student engagement;
- Improved access to culturally responsive mental health services; and
- Improved mental health and well-being for vulnerable students.

Staff

- Increased understanding of the range of services available to support the needs of our diverse student population; and
- Increased understanding of service gaps in the community.

System

- Increased community partnerships;
- Increased effective collaboration with community partners to ensure a seamless circle of care; and
- Improved capacity to meet the mental health needs of students.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPIS) TO MONITOR PROGRESS AND IMPACT

Performance indicators for the OCDSB Mental Health Strategy will be monitored regularly through:

- The annual reporting process for the District's Strategic Plan 2019-2023 (System);
- Annual action plans developed from the Mental Health Strategy (System);
- Work with other Departments (i.e. Curriculum Services and/or Human Resources) to gather data and implement methods to collect information related to student and staff mental health (Student);
- Learning Support Services will also continue to engage in ongoing evaluation of various mental health programs and services offered to staff and students across the District;
- School learning plans (well-being) (Student/Staff);
- Staff professional development (Staff);
- Student survey (Student).

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS — ALIGNED WITH THE BOARD STRATEGIC PLAN — INCLUDE:

- School climate;
- Student engagement;
- Staff engagement;
- Parent engagement;
- Social emotional skills (e.g., self-awareness, self-regulation, social awareness, positive social relationships, and responsible decision making); and
- Academic achievement.

9

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DRAFT

MEMORANDUM

Memo No. 19-109

TO: Trustees
             Student Trustees

FROM: Camille Williams-Taylor, Director of Education and Secretary of the Board
             Peter Symmonds, Superintendent of Learning Support Services

DATE: 20 September 2019

RE: **Draft Mental Health Strategy Update**

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The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an update on the status of the development of the OCDSB Mental Health Strategy.

As outlined in Memo 19-072, Draft Mental Health Strategy, work began developing the new Mental Health Strategy in spring 2018. One component of the work included seeking feedback from the OCDSB advisory committees. To date, the draft strategy has been presented to the Advisory Committee on Equity (ACE) on 23 May 2019 and the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) on 12 June 2019.

With feedback and input from members of these committees, work on developing the strategy has continued over the summer. Based on the feedback provided, the strategy has been updated as follows:

1. The strategic priority areas identified by School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO) have been embedded into the OCDSB cultures of innovation, caring and social responsibility to reflect the direct alignment of the work in mental health with the OCDSB Strategic Plan. As part of the restructuring of the strategy, the following sections have been added: desired outcomes for students, staff and the system and key performance indicators;
2. References have been added;
3. While the importance of identity was referenced in the initial draft, it has been explicitly referenced in the current version to highlight our ongoing learning and to emphasize the prominence of identity as a factor that influences Mental Health;
4. Language has been added to reinforce that supporting mental health from mental health promotion through to intervention for mental health challenges is done through an equity lens in a culturally responsive manner;
5. The wording describing the graphic illustrating what students need to build and sustain mental health has been clarified; and
6. The strategy has been formatted by the Communications Department.

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It was presented to the Indigenous Education Advisory Committee (IEAC) on 19 September 2019.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Dr. Petra Duschner at petra.duschner@ocdsb.ca.

cc   Senior Staff
           Manager, Board Services
           Special Education Advisory Committee
           Advisory Committee on Equity
           Corporate Records

OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

MEMORANDUM

Memo No. 19-103

TO: Trustees
Student Trustees

FROM: Camille Williams-Taylor, Director of Education and Secretary of the Board
Peter Symmonds, Superintendent of Learning Support Services
Dr. Petra Duschner, Manager, Mental Health & Critical Services

DATE: 20 September 2019

RE: **Support for Mental Health Through An Equity Lens**

The following memo provides information on the development of the OCDSB Mental Health Strategy in accordance with the strategic priorities identified by School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO) and the alignment between the Mental Health Strategy and the OCDSB Strategic Plan in order to provide a context for a Board motion related to mental health services, especially for students who self-identify as First Nations, Métis, Inuit and for male students of African descent. The memo further outlines staff's proposed steps forward in understanding and addressing the Board motion.

1. **OCDSB Mental Health Strategy:**

The OCDSB is currently in the process of developing a Mental Health Strategy for 2019-2022. The Mental Health Strategy is a requirement of School Mental Health Ontario which outlines areas of strategic priority:

1. Organizational conditions;
2. Capacity building;
3. Evidence-based mental health promotion & prevention programming;
4. Equity and specific populations;
5. System coordination and pathways;
6. Youth and family engagement; and
7. Progress monitoring and impact.

To operationalize the priorities identified in the Mental Health Strategy, annual mental health action plans will be developed to identify key work, approach/methods used, success indicators and timelines.

2. **Alignment with OCDSB Strategic Plan:**

The development of the Mental Health Strategy is informed by the OCDSB Strategic Plan 2019-2023. To date, data has been gathered from staff, students and parents and further input is being sought through consultation with Board committees (e.g., Advisory

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Committee on Equity, Special Education Advisory Committee, etc.) and community partners. Together this information will inform the development of the Strategy so that it not only meets the requirements of SMHO, but reflects the needs of the OCDSB community in line with the OCDSB Strategic Plan. Specifically, the OCDSB Mental Health Strategy 2019-2022 will be aligned with the OCDSB's Strategic Plan and the strategic priorities will be embedded in Cultures of Innovation, Caring and Social Responsibility.

3. **Board Motion:**

At Committee of the Whole (COW) on April 16, 2019, the following motion was referred to staff for a response by the end of September 2019:

THAT the Board direct staff to explore and report on funding to support mental health through an equity lens, especially for students who self-identify as First Nations, Métis, Inuit and for male students of African descent.

THAT the Board direct staff to evaluate, through an equity lens, barriers to access mental health services within the OCDSB, especially for students who self-identify as First Nations, Métis, Inuit and for male students of African descent.

4. **Relationship between OCDSB Mental Health Strategy and Board Motion**:

As will be outlined in the OCDSB Mental Health Strategy, an equity lens is applied to all work in mental health. We continue to deepen our understanding of identities and the impact of identity on mental health and will strive to provide culturally responsive interventions. For example:

Capacity Building: a goal to *increase staff knowledge in equity and inclusive practice* and in *creating and sustaining mentally healthy and inclusive schools* will help ensure a welcoming, inclusive environment where staff know and understand their students' profiles and history, as well as the impact of social determinants of health (e.g., education, income, employment, housing, access to health services, race), historical and intergenerational trauma and systemic marginalization on mental health. Within this context, students will feel safe, included and cared for. Diversity is recognized and respected as students see themselves reflected in their environment and in the curriculum and will feel they matter and have a sense of belonging.

Equity and Specific Populations: specific focus on equity and specific populations as a strategic priority will help ensure that educators understand identity and how identity impacts mental health. Further, it ensures that specific groups of students will be able to access culturally responsive support for mental health issues.

System Coordination and Pathways: As a priority area, this focus will help ensure that pathways to care include culturally relevant community resources and services (e.g., Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO), Rajo Project, Jaku Konbit, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, Inuuqatigiit) and that those resources are known and accessible to those who need them. This will build a system of care following a tiered approach to intervention within which each student can access the supports and services needed, when they need them.

5. **Plan to address the Board motion:**

With respect to addressing the specific elements outlined in the Board motion, the following plan is proposed for consideration:

1. Current funding provided by the Ministry includes: funding for mental health workers in secondary schools, funding for Well-being, Safe, Accepting and Healthy schools and Mental Health. Specific mental health services are also provided through community partnerships which fund school-based community mental health workers, including those mentioned above. Through Jordan's Principle, funding is available for First Nations and Inuit students to access a range of services including mental health services. We will explore other sources of funding available to enhance or expand mental health supports.

2. To explore and report on systemic barriers to access mental health services within the OCDSB, we propose a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach including:
    1. Literature review on the barriers to accessing mental health services for Indigenous youth and youth of African descent;
    2. Community collaboration on exiting review. For example, Ottawa Pubic Health is engaged in a research project (Mental Health of Ottawa's Black Community) which aims to better understand the Black community's views on mental health, identify and address gaps in the mental health care system and develop community-based strategies to better connect families to mental health services and reduce health inequities;
    3. Engage the OCDSB community through focus groups including students who identify as First Nations, Inuit or Métis and students of African-descent to better understand their experience in accessing mental health services within their schools and community in order to identify and address barriers to access; and
    4. Survey of staff to assess their knowledge of existing pathways of care both within the school district and in the community.

The plan proposed by staff will serve to enhance the District's understanding of mental health and well-being, while deepening our understanding of the complexities and barriers to supporting the mental well-being of specific populations. This will inform our next steps towards improving services and experiences for students.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Peter Symmonds at peter.symmonds@ocdsb.ca

cc   Senior Staff
         Manager, Board Services
         Special Education Advisory Committee
         Corporate Records

**Building Brighter Futures Together at the
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board**

OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)   **17 September 2019**
Report No. 19-081

Update on the Identity-based Data Collection Project

**Key Contact: Michèle Giroux, Executive Officer, Corporate Services,
                613-596-8211 ext. 8310
                Dorothy Baker, Superintendent of Instruction,**

PURPOSE:

1.   To provide an update on the Identity-based Data Collection project, including the student and community focus group meetings and the proposed plan and timelines for data collection, analysis and reporting.

CONTEXT:

2.   The OCDSB has a strong commitment to improving equity of access and opportunity for all students. In 2011, the OCDSB undertook a comprehensive student survey "snapshot" in time. Since then, our community has expressed strong interest in formalizing a process for the ongoing collection of identity based data as a tool to better understand and eliminate systemic barriers. With the introduction of the *Equity Action Plan* (2014), and the subsequent enactment of the *Ontario Anti-Racism Act* (2017), a framework for school districts to move forward with this work is now in place. The *Act*, which applies to all publicly-funded institutions, specifically acknowledges four groups that are most adversely impacted by racism, including Indigenous, Black, Jewish communities, and communities that are adversely impacted by Islamophobia. Standards for the collection of identity-based data by public sector institutions in Ontario are described in detail in the *Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism* (see Appendix A for a summary of the standards).

3.   In May 2018, the Ministry of Education released the *Ontario Education Equity Action Plan*, which outlines the provincial framework for identifying and eliminating discriminatory practices and systemic barriers and bias from Ontario schools and classrooms. The Equity Action Plan has four main areas:
            • School and Classroom Practices
            • Leadership, Governance and Human Resource Practices
            • Data Collection, Integration and Reporting
            • Organizational Culture Change

Work is planned or underway in all of these areas at the OCDSB, but the focus of this report is on the collection, integration and reporting of data.

4. Over the last two years, the OCDSB has been working with the Education Equity Secretariat and other districts to develop standards of practice for data collection by school boards in Ontario. In 2018-2019, the District applied for and received funding through the Secretariat to build capacity in preparation for the collection, analysis and use of identity-based data. The funding was in support of the first phase of the data collection project - undertaking focus groups with community partners, parents, and students to better understand lived experiences and how the collection of identity-based data might help to identify strategies to overcome barriers. The focus group sessions were held in the spring of 2019 and were very useful in informing our work. The second phase of the data collection project is the administration of a survey which will collect demographic and perceptual data for all students in the system. The survey will be undertaken in late November/early December 2019.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

Community Partners and Focus Group Sessions
5. The insight of our community partners was a critical starting point for planning the Focus Group Sessions. In May 2019, the OCDSB invited participation from a range of community partner groups and agencies to discuss strategies for the structure, participation and feedback of the focus group sessions; 44 community members attended the two meetings. The input of our partners helped to develop the plans for focus groups with students and parents of students who have experienced racism, bias, or barriers, including anti-Black racism, anti-Indigeneity, anti-Semitism, Homophobia, Islamophobia, Transphobia, Poverty/Classism, and Ableism/Disabilities.

Focus Groups and Findings
6. Based on the input from our community partners, separate focus groups were held for participants who identified from our Indigenous community and those from other equity seeking groups. Through May and June, two focus group sessions were held for students and three focus group sessions were held for parents. We were fortunate to have participation from approximately 60 students and 147 parents.

7. The focus group discussions were very powerful. Participants shared their experiences about racism, bias, and gaps that exist in the system. Five themes emerged in the discussions:

- **The Importance of Identity** – participants discussed the complexity of identity; the sense of community that arises from identity; the risks of stereotyping associated with identity; and the very personal nature of the journey of how we define our identity;

- **Staff Awareness** – participants acknowledged the need for better staff awareness and capacity to supporting issues of identity; concern was expressed about the risk of learning expectations being established based on identity rather than capacity; and the need to balance engaging students identity in the classroom and expecting the students to be a knowledge expert on the history and culture of their identity;
- **Programming for Students** – participants discussed the importance of relevant programming for students; access to programming and resources; and the need to ensure that where specific learning needs are identified and documented, such as in an IEP, those needs are addressed in the classroom;
- **Representation –** participants addressed the importance and value of having an OCDSB workforce that is representative of the students in our classrooms; in addition, they discussed the importance of having learning resources which include and reflect the identities of our students;
- **Connectedness** – participants discussed the importance of ensuring opportunities for students/communities to connect, and acknowledged the value of forums such as the Black Youth Forum, the Indigenous Youth Day, Date for Diversity, and the Rainbow Youth Forum to create awareness and a sense of belonging.

These discussions reaffirmed how much identity matters in student learning and well-being and why it is so important that we allow students to engage in opportunities to address the experience of their identity. The focus groups discussions identified the following top five actions the OCDSB needs to take:

  i.   **Acknowledge** that racism and bias exist in the education system;
 ii.   **Listen** to what our parents, students, staff and community partners are telling us;
iii.   **Gain an understanding** of the values that shape students' identity;
iv.   **Increase representation** of diverse groups in staff to promote a greater sense of belonging for students; and
 v.   **Be sensitive** in the data collection and reporting so as not to reinforce stereotypes.

The information collected from focus groups has helped the District better understand the disparities, biases, and gaps that exist in the system. This information is being used to help shape the data collection process, but also to develop our system capacity to support student learning and well-being.

Follow up with Community
8.   The follow-up and feedback with participants and community partners is critical. Recognizing that participants have different needs, two summary documents have been created from the focus group sessions:

- Appendix B is a graphic summary of the feedback learned from the focus group discussions; and

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- Appendix C is a detailed report of the sessions and the feedback received.

These documents will be shared with all participants electronically and posted on the District website. They will also be used to update our Advisory Committees. In addition, a follow-up meeting will be held with community partners to reflect on the feedback and discuss strategies to engage the community in the next stage of our data collection project.

Using Data to Address these Issues

9. In November 2019, the District will undertake the collection of voluntary demographic and perceptual data for all students (K-12). This includes questions about race, gender identity, ethnicity, language and sexual orientation. This type of data, when analyzed with other data sets can be very helpful in revealing trends which could help to answer questions about:

- **Achievement Gaps** – whether certain groups of students achieve at the same rate;
- **Suspension and Expulsion Rates** – whether certain groups of students are suspended or expelled at a higher rate;
- **Streaming** – whether certain groups of students are over or under represented in particular programs or streams (academic versus applied; English with Core French or Elementary French Immersion);
- **Sense of Belonging** - whether certain groups of students feel more engaged/disengaged at school;
- **Feeling Safe at School** – whether certain groups of students feel more or less safe at school.

Data collection has the potential to inform the development of strategies to address such trends and to support the decision-making process. However, we must carefully plan for the ethical and focused collection and use of the data. The purpose of the student survey is:

a. to gather demographic information about the unique and diverse characteristics of the OCDSB's student population;
b. to identify and respond to barriers to student learning and well-being;
c. to enhance the District's capacity to serve its increasingly diverse student population and client communities.

Survey Development and Planning for Analysis

10. The data collection process will be done by survey during the period November 26 to December 13, 2019. The key project timelines are attached in Appendix D. For students in Kindergarten through Grade 6, parents will be invited to complete one survey per child. Students in grades 7-12 will be invited to complete the survey in school during class time. The survey will be conducted electronically, using a direct email link, hard copies will be made available as required to accommodate individual requests.

11.   This is a voluntary survey which means that individuals will be able to opt out of survey completion entirely or opt out of specific questions. For students in Kindergarten through grade 6, parents will receive information about the survey and a link to complete it on behalf of their child(ren). For students in grades 7 through 12, parents will be sent a letter with an opt-out consent form. Students in grades 7 through 12 who have consent, will still have the ability to opt out of the survey in its entirety or omit any individual questions if they choose.

12.   The survey will be confidential, but not anonymous. School staff will not have access to the individual student responses and the data will be stored in a separate database. There will be a unique identifier on the survey data which will allow the research staff doing the analysis to link and analyze the survey data with other data sets (e.g., achievement data, suspension data, course participation rates, etc.). This will be done with data which is stripped of student identifiers (student name, OEN, address) and will only be reported on in aggregate numbers.

Survey Questions

13.   Research staff has been reviewing the provincial Data Standards and sample survey questions used previously by the OCDSB, by other school districts, and those developed by the provincial working group. Using the input received from the focus group sessions and from our advisory committees and community members over the last year, a list of questions is being developed for our survey.

The regulations under the Anti-Racism Act, establish a framework for the order and nature of questions relating to personal information.
- Indigenous Identity
- Race
- Ethnic origin
- Religion
- Age
- Sex
- Education
- Geospatial information, such as postal code for place of residence, or place of work
- Socio-economic information, such as educational level, annual income, employment status, occupation, or housing status
- Citizenship
- Immigration status
- Gender identity and gender expression
- Sexual orientation
- Place of birth
- Languages
- Marital status •
- Family status
- (Dis)abilities

These types of personal information may be relevant for analyzing systemic racial inequalities in outcomes by considering the intersection of race with other social identities. The information may also support a better understanding of the factors that potentially contribute to, reinforce, or underlie systemic racial inequalities in outcomes.

Applying OCAP Principles

14. In our discussions with the community and with the Indigenous Education Advisory Committee, questions were raised about the application of the First Nations principles of ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP). In response to these concerns, several members of the research staff have recently completed a program offered by the First Nations Information Governance Centre in partnership with Algonquin College that provides a comprehensive overview of the principles. We will be continuing to work with the Indigenous community on the application of these principles to our work.

Data Integrity

15. Data integrity is a critical component in the planning phase. To ensure the secure and efficient collection of data, the District undertook a request for proposal for data collection software and selected Qualtrics as the preferred platform. The Qualtrics research platform provides organizations with a secure online collection and reporting tool that encrypts data during transmission and at rest, stores data on Canadian servers, and is accessible only to authorized users at the District. An implementation team from Qualtrics has been assigned to work with READ staff on this project.

The system also provides a mechanism for direct communication with survey respondents which will be particularly useful in ensuring that responses from survey participants can be linked to other administrative data once it has been collected.

Information letters for parents will be translated into the most common languages in the District, as indicated in Trillium. The Qualtrics research platform also has embedded translation capabilities that will allow respondents to translate questions into a language other than English should they require this additional support. All responses are converted to English in the final data set that is produced for analysis.

System Readiness and Support

16. In order to support implementation of the Identity Based Survey, superintendents, principals and managers will be engaging in the facilitated completion of two modules developed in partnership with the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI) in October. The two modules are Diversity and Inclusion Fundamentals and Unconscious Bias. The logistics and operational aspects of survey delivery will be a focus for the October Operations meeting. Schools will

receive ongoing support from the Research, Evaluation and Analytics Division as well as the central Equity and Indigenous Education teams. Fact sheets, question and answer documents and other resources will also be made available.

<u>Reporting</u>

17.   It is anticipated that preliminary reporting of results from the collection of identity-based data will begin in late spring of 2020 with a summary of what we heard from our students and parents (on behalf of their child). Linkages to student achievement outcomes will begin to be incorporated in reports that are already being produced beginning with the 2019-2020 Annual Student Achievement Report to be available in the fall of 2020. Identification of new reports to be generated and timelines associated with those has yet to be determined.

On a move forward basis, a decision will need to be made as to the frequency of the survey cycle. The Toronto District School Board, which currently has the longest history of conducting such surveys, operates on a five-year cycle. Anything less than a three-year cycle is not sustainable.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

18.   The District has received $103,000 in one-time funding through a Transfer Payment Agreement to support this work to the end of November 2019. Funds were to be used to hire research staff, with the balance allocated towards meeting costs associated with the conduct of focus groups. The Ministry of Education has recently announced availability of up to $50,000 in additional funds to continue to support this work through August 2020 through an application process. Any requirement for additional staff to support this important work on a more regular basis will be brought to Board as part of the budget process.

19.   The District has also invested in the software that will be used to support the data collection for this project. The software also offers capabilities to generate reports and dashboards, making it a versatile tool for other initiatives within the District. Annual licensing fees are approximately $120,000 and have been absorbed by the READ operating budget, which includes approximately $60,000 from the MISA Local Capacity Building budget allocation in the GSNs.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

20.   Collecting personal information about race and ethnicity is sensitive work. It is essential that all employees involved in the collection and use of the data have a fulsome understanding of the importance, value and sensitivity of the work and the purpose of collection and use. Our focus is to build a communication and awareness campaign that is respectful, culturally sensitive,

transparent and done in an accessible way that ensures individual privacy and confidentiality.

Our collaboration with community partner organizations has been critical to creating a sense of community support, and will continue to play a key role in our work moving forward. Our next meeting with community partner organizations will focus on strategies to support outreach and participation in the survey process. Staff continues to reach out to our advisory committees and key community members/partners for advice/guidance on such things as: implementation/communication strategies; and, analysis, interpretation and reporting that aligns with the Data Standards while balancing the needs of each community/equity-seeking group.

21.   A detailed communications plan is underway. The focus of communication activities in September will be to report out on the focus group sessions and build awareness of the identity based data collection process with key stakeholder groups. In October, more detailed communications will begin which will focus on building awareness of the purpose of data collection process, the timing and operational details of the survey process and how to get more detailed information. In addition, training will be provided to build capacity of school based staff to support students and families in the survey process.   In late October/early November, the communication will be more focused on timing, consent, and how to participate. In December, communication will be focused on reminders for survey completion and thank you to all participants.

22.   A variety of strategies will be used to ensure communications reach all of our different audiences, including:
    a) **Print** – posters for schools and pamphlets/brochures for parents, school staff, community members and school councils to create awareness throughout the system;
    b) **Digital** – online visuals and digital information to be available on the District and school websites and in social media, as well as direct emails, school council newsletters and Keeping You Connected;
    c) **Promotional videos** featuring student and parent voice; and
    d) **Face-to-face opportunities** to discuss plans (e.g., superintendency meetings, Student Senate, pop-up forums).

An important area of focus in the coming weeks will be strategies to support and engage students and parents who may need assistance/support with language and/or translation, or with access to technology or guided assistance for survey completion. We will continue to reach out to community partners, MLO's, and school based staff to develop strategies to support this work.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

23.   This work is a critical step in our strategic commitment to identify and remove barriers and ensure equity of access and opportunity for all students. Our commitment to equity and the data collection work happens at the system level, but the impact on our work will be to positively impact the student experience in the classroom and at school.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can the information learned from the focus groups inform the discussions and decision-making of the Board?
2. How will the collection of identity based data inform the work of the Board?
3. How can trustees support and encourage parent and student participation in the survey collection process?
4. What specific information or resource materials would assist in this regard?

_____   _____
Michèle Giroux   Camille Williams-Taylor
Executive Officer, Corporate Services   Director of Education/Secretary of the
                                                                     Board

Identity Based Data Collection – Overview and Standards

- The Research, Evaluation, Analytics and Data Division is responsible for identity based data collection at the OCDSB;
- Work on identity based data is governed by the Anti-Racism Act and the Data Standards issued by the Province of Ontario for all public sector organizations. The Act seeks to eliminate systemic racism and advance racial equity supports and acknowledges four groups that are most adversely impacted by racism, including Indigenous, Black, and Jewish communities, and communities that are adversely impacted by Islamophobia.
- The Act requires the Province to set targets within 12 months of the adoption of the Act (May 2018). Such targets may inform our work/responsibilities, but are not yet available.
- The district submitted a grant application to the Education Equity Secretariat of the Ministry of Education last year. The grant application sought funding for two things – some readiness work on data infrastructure and a qualitative research project to engage in conversations with the community to better understand lived experiences in our schools regarding systemic racism. This work was considered an important first step in seeking community input to help inform thinking about how the collection of identity based data could help to overcome systemic racism.
- The grant application was initially approved by the Ministry; however, funding was delayed and only recently became available. The Division has been continuing with this work within existing resources.
- The data standards include requirements that the school board must follow; rationale for each standard; and Guidance about exemplary practices. The standards cover 7 areas- see reverse.
- The current focus of our work is capacity building in terms of understanding the data standards. Data standards 1-5 emphasize the importance of organizational planning and readiness prior to any data collection. This includes identification of organizational objectives, responsibilities, training on both anti-racism and responsibilities under the Anti-Racism Act, data governance and organizational needs assessment.
- Some organizational readiness work must occur before community consultation and some is achieved based on what is learned from the community.
- Community consultation, modelled on the grant proposal, is proposed for Spring 2019. Between now and then, staff will be working on the following:
  - o Data standards knowledge and capacity building;
  - o Liaison with other school districts and public sector organizations;
  - o Establishing a group of community agency partners that can inform our work;
  - o Work with ACE and IEAC will continue to be consulted as regular advisory bodies to the district;
- Planning and preparation for data collection would occur between March and June 2019;
- Identity Based Data Collection planned for fall of 2019; methodology to be determined (ie at registration, as a census, etc).

Overview of the Data Standards

1. Assess, Plan and Prepare
   o Identify need and establish specific organizational objectives for personal information collection based on stakeholder and community input.
   o Determine organizational priorities and resources and conduct a privacy impact assessment.
   o Identify meaningful policy, program, or service delivery outcomes, and establish an analysis plan.
   o Establish data governance processes and develop and plan collection policies and procedures, including measures related to quality assurance and security of personal information.
   o Identify training needs and develop and deliver appropriate training and other resources to support compliance with the ARA, the regulations and the Standards, and relevant privacy legislation.

2. Collect Personal Information
   o Communicate the purpose and manner of personal information collection to clients and communities.
   o Implement the collection of personal information based on voluntary express consent.

2. Manage and Protect Personal Information
   o Implement processes for quality assurance and the security of personal information.
   o Maintain and promote secure systems and processes for retaining, storing, and disposing of personal information.
   o Limit access to and use of personal information

4. Analyse the Information Collected
   o Calculate and interpret racial disproportionality or disparity statistics.
   o Apply thresholds and interpret whether notable differences exist that require further analysis and/or remedial action.

5. Release of Data and Results of Analysis to the Public
   o De-identify data sets and results of analyses before making information public, consistent with Open Government principles.
   o Include results of racial disproportionalities or disparities in the reports to the public, along with thresholds used.

6. Support and Promote Anti-Racism Organizational Change
   o Use information to better understand racial inequities, and to inform evidence-based decisions to remove systemic barriers and advance racial equity.
   o Continue to monitor and evaluate progress and outcomes.
   o Promote public education and engagement about anti-racism.

7. Participant Observer Information (POI)
   o Plan to collect, manage and use POI with input from affected communities and stakeholders.
   o Implement the collection of POI according to requirements for indirect collection.
   o Have measures in place to ensure the accuracy of POI before use.

Identity-Based Data Collection
Input from Our Communities

Ottawa-Carleton DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Valuing Voices

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE?

to gather information that will help the District identify and monitor systemic barriers and identity-based disparities within the education system.

WHAT DID WE DO?

2 Community Partner Meetings
44 Community Members

3 Focus Groups with Parents
147 Parents

2 Focus Groups with Students
60 Students
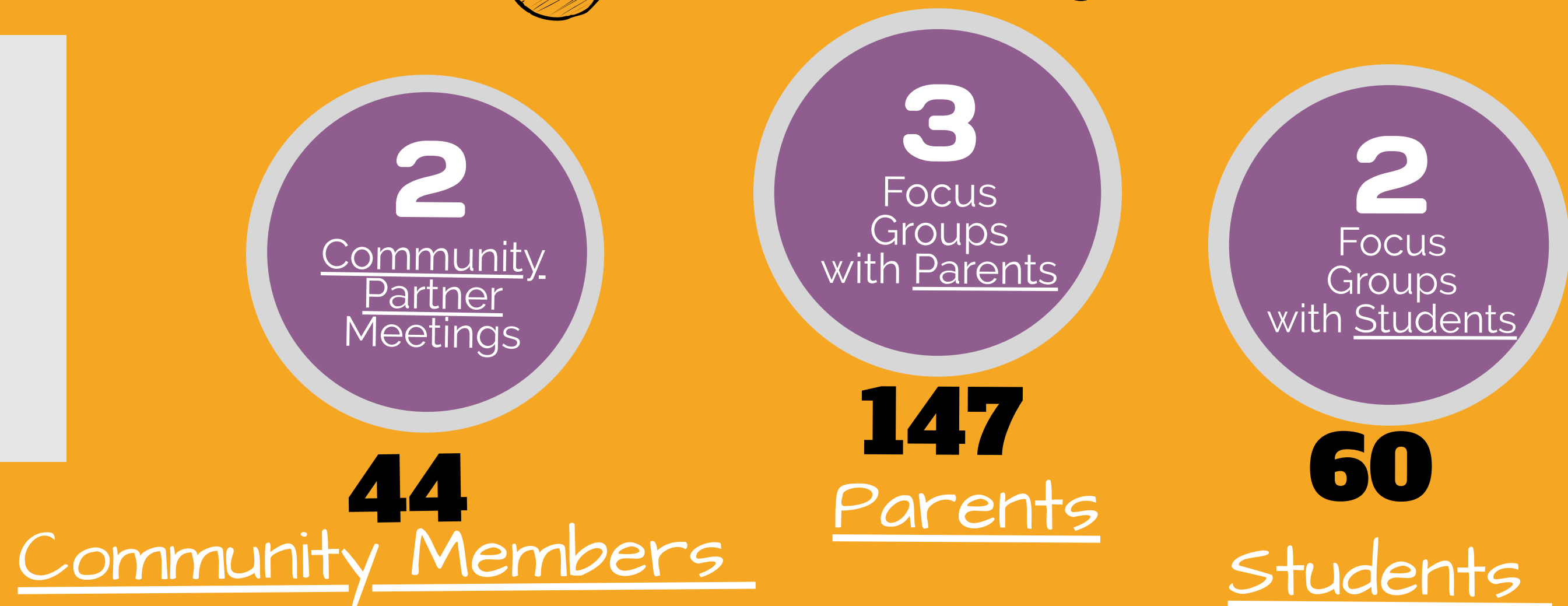
WHAT DID WE HEAR?

REPRESENTATION

"...schools are doing a superficial level. The data shows that 43% of students are members of racial groups but only 8% is staff. On an international day, Caucasian teachers represent different nations, which is funny. Hiring practices are keeping the school board "white.""

CONNECTEDNESS

"..club and sports activities and, cultural celebrations are great opportunities to help us connect with friends who identify like us and increase our sense of belonging."

PROGRAMMING FOR STUDENTS

"My child was diagnosed with Dyspraxia- lots of work done to identify and then nothing happens after that."

STAFF AWARENESS

"Opportunities that were open to me when teachers thought I was White have now been closed. Now that people know I am Indigenous, teachers expect me to only work on Indigenous topics and issues. Being Indigenous is treated like a disability."

THE IMPORTANCE OF IDENTITY

"Identity is complex – it puts you into a community but emphasises your individuality. "

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

Acknowledge that racism and bias exist in the education system

Increase representation of diverse groups in staff to promote greater sense of belonging for students

Identity Matters! Allow students to engage in opportunities to address experience of identity

Listen to what our parents, students, and community partners are telling us

Gain understanding of values that shape students' identity

Be Sensitive in the data collection and reporting so as not to reinforce stereotypes

WHAT IS NEXT?

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2019	OCTOBER – NOVEMBER 2019	NOVEMBER 26 – DECEMBER 13	DECEMBER 2019-JANUARY 2020	JANUARY – APRIL 2020	MAY 2020
Feedback to community and input for future plans	Communication with schools, parents, and communities Pilot administration	Survey administration	Distribution of Thank-you notes	Data analysis Stakeholder consultations	Release of preliminary results

Focus Groups with Students and Parents

Summary Report of Findings

Contents

Context

In 2017, the Province enacted the Anti-Racism Act and provided a framework for school boards in Ontario to collect identity-based data. The purpose of the Act is to identify systemic barriers and biases to help advance racial equity for all students. The Act specifically identified four groups that are adversely impacted by racism including Indigenous, Black, Jewish communities, and communities that are adversely impacted by Islamophobia. The OCDSB has added LGBTQ2S+, New Comers, Poverty, and Accessibility groups to align with the current strategic direction.

The Ontario Education Equity Secretariat in the Ministry of Education has worked with staff from several school districts across the province to plan for province-wide collection of identity-based data. Collecting identity-based data is aimed at helping districts to precisely identify systemic barriers and help with strategies on how to eliminate discriminatory biases in order to support equity in student achievement and well-being. Consequently, on 4 February 2019, Report No. 19-019 on the Identity-Based Data Collection was presented to Committee of the Whole that described the work to be undertaken by the OCDSB to support the collection of identity-based data for all students K-12.

Equity in education is crucial in terms of improving all students' academic achievement and well-being as set out in *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan* (2017). As defined in *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation*, (Ministry of Education, 2014), an equitable educational environment provides a welcoming and respectful environment for all students. Further, the guidelines indicate that an equitable and inclusive education system also supports and inspires each student to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning. Following this lead, the OCDSB 2019-2023 strategic plan reinforces and supports an equitable education environment for all students.

> *"Opportunities that were open to me when teachers thought I was White have now been closed. Now that people know I am Indigenous, teachers expect me to only work on Indigenous topics and issues. Being Indigenous is treated like a disability."*

According to *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan* (2017), the diversity of the students in Ontario should be reflected in the diversity of their educators including teachers, school administrators, and school system leaders. Several students who participated in our focus groups reiterated the need to see staff members with similar identities as themselves. In a recent study examining the lived experiences of disengaged First Nations youth from schools, Walker (2019) highlights the importance of cross-cultural staff training to increase the understanding related to cultural norms of others. Recently, the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO, 2016) held forums with immigrant and refugee parents who expressed that they would like to see a welcoming, inclusive and engaging environment, clear and accessible communications, knowledge of what the curriculum entails, and a clear understanding of values and cultures being taught to their children.

In order to promote a safe and welcoming environment, information garnered from the collection of identity-based data will allow the OCDSB to identify and take action to eliminate systemic barriers faced by students in our school district.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to summarize what was shared during the focus group discussions with students and parents with a view to using the information to plan for district-wide collection of identify-based data in November 2019, the subsequent analysis and reporting out of results and identification of next steps for action as a result of what we learn. In the OCDSB, the current project includes three key phases:

(1) **community partner meetings** - two meetings held at the beginning of May 2019 helped staff refine plans for focus group discussions with students, and parents of students who have experienced racism, bias, or barriers, including anti-Black racism, anti-Indigeneity, anti-Semitism, Homophobia, Islamophobia, Transphobia, Poverty/Classism, and Ableism/Disabilities;

(2) **student and parent focus group discussions** - two student sessions and three parent sessions allowed participants to share their experiences as they related to racism, bias, or barriers with other attendees in a safe environment; and,

(3) **the collection of identity-based data** – will take place beginning in November 2019.

Process

This Identity-Based Data Collection Project adopted a qualitative research approach to engage in conversations with the community to better understand the lived experiences in our schools regarding systemic barriers and identity-based disparities. Focus groups were utilized to obtain the narrative from students and parents. The goal of the focus groups was to explore participants' experiences, understanding and interpretations of their experiences in-depth (Tavakol & Sandars 2014).

These narratives were captured to give power and a voice to those who have been marginalized by the system. Processes and outcomes such as behaviours, attitudes, interactions, and learning environments cannot always be understood adequately through numerical data (Pope & Mays, 2006; Harding, 2013). Qualitative research is well established and has gained acceptance as a valuable tool in the study of education, with a growing recognition that they can be pursued with rigour (Ramani & Mann, 2016). The information collected from focus groups will help the District better understand the disparities, biases, and gaps that exist in the system, and help shape questions for the data collection tool. They will also assist in setting priorities for analysis and reporting.

Who Participated?

The Identity-based Data Collection project involves collecting data from community partners, parents, and students. As a first step, the community partner meetings helped with planning for recruitment of parents and students for the focus groups and for the actual data collection scheduled to take place in November 2019. Guiding questions for both focus groups were developed based on the feedback received from the community partners. Focus groups provided a safe environment for students and parents to share their lived experiences within the school board. Recruitment strategies and data collection methods were as follows:

1. Community Partners

An invitation letter with guiding questions was sent to 40 community partner organizations and/or individuals with whom the District had an established relationship and that represent the eight groups of students identified above. They were asked to invite up to three members from their respective communities. Dates and venues were communicated to the community partners, along with an online registration link. A total of 44 community members from diverse communities attended one of the two meetings where they discussed the following questions:

> - What are the conditions that need to be in place for students and parents to feel safe in sharing their experiences and that they have been heard?
> - What suggestions do you have for focus group question that will help us identify potential systemic barriers and/or bias from the lived experiences?
> - What strategies do you have that might support engagement of your community in either the focus groups or the data collection in the fall?
> - Is there anything we should be asking in the focus groups?

2. Student Focus Groups

Principals from OCDSB secondary schools (7-12 and 9-12) were asked to recruit a maximum of five (5) students in grades 7 to 12 to participate in the focus groups sessions and to identify a member of staff who could accompany the students to the venue. Sessions were held at non-OCDSB facilities at the recommendation of community partners. Approximately 60 students from 11 schools participated in the opportunity to discuss the following questions with their peers:

> - How do you identify yourself and why is that important to you?
> - How has your identity been shaped within the school system?
> - What has helped to create a sense of belonging in your school? What has helped promote your academic success?
> - What has prevented you from feeling and doing your best in school?
> - What do you think is important for the school system district to consider when collecting identity-based data?

3. Parent Focus Groups

Multiple ways of communication were used to recruit parents for focus groups including a memorandum to principals that included posters to create awareness at the school, and distribution of information letters and invitations to parents/guardians of all students via the District's *School Connects* system. While the invitation suggested that these discussions may be of particular interest to parents of students who have experienced racism, bias, or barriers, including anti-Black, anti-Indigeneity, anti-Semitism, Homophobia, Islamophobia, Transphobia, Poverty/Classism, and Ableism/Disabilities, no restrictions were placed on participation from parents/guardians of students who do not identify in these ways.

Participation in the focus groups was voluntary and no personal information was collected. Sessions were organized for parents of students in our District, and took place on June 11, 17, and 18 from 7 p.m. – 9 p.m. Two sessions were held off-site, and one was held at a secondary school. These discussions were used to gather information from parents of students in kindergarten through Grade 12.

The following questions were used to shape the discussion for parent's focus group:

- Why is identity important?

- How has the school system impacted your child's sense of identity?

- What has helped promote your child's academic success and sense of belonging?

- What has prevented your child from feeling and doing their best in school?

- What do you think is important for the school district to consider when collecting identity-based data?

A total of 147 participants registered for the parent focus group discussions. Out of the 147 - 81 registered for June 11, 52 registered for June 17, and 14 registered for June 18. Students attending the sessions and/or their parents expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have these conversations and help shape our work moving forward.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants' responses to questions were recorded by a note taker assigned to each table – in most cases note takers were members of central staff (primarily research and instructional coaches from Curriculum Services, Equity, and Indigenous Education). The data collected from community partners, student and parent focus group discussions were analyzed using NVivo. A standard thematic coding process was used to create idea groupings as well as a list of codes grouped into themes (Patton, 2002). The themes were created in response to the focus group questions and to develop a deeper understanding of systemic barriers and/or bias and their potential to impede success in learning as well as impact on students' well-being.

Strengths and Limitations

The strength of the focus group lies in gathering and sharing the lived experiences of students and parents who have experienced racism, bias, or barriers in our school system. The candidness with which participants shared their experiences was appreciated, ultimately providing a foundation that will assist the District in better understanding the challenges faced by marginalized communities in their efforts to succeed in learning. It is also worth noting that the parent focus group discussions brought together parents who were allies, parents preparing for their children to enter the system and parents of children with invisible disabilities. The questions asked by community partners, parents and expressed challenges by students will guide the development of future survey questions and help with the analysis and dissemination strategies/process. A few limitations should also be considered when interpreting the results of the focus group discussions;

- limited time to raise awareness of the session in the community,
- limited knowledge of the purpose of identity-based data collection by the participants,
- reliance on students belonging to clubs and principal's selection for recruitment,
- unequal representation of diverse groups

What We Heard

Key findings based on the focus group discussions with students and parents are reported together as the coding practice of responses revealed similar themes. Direct quotes from both students and parents have been incorporated to enhance understanding of the five themes that emerged, including: the importance of identity, representation, staff awareness, programming for students, and connectedness.

Overarching Themes

Importance of Identity	Representation	Staff Awareness
Programming for Students	Connectedness	
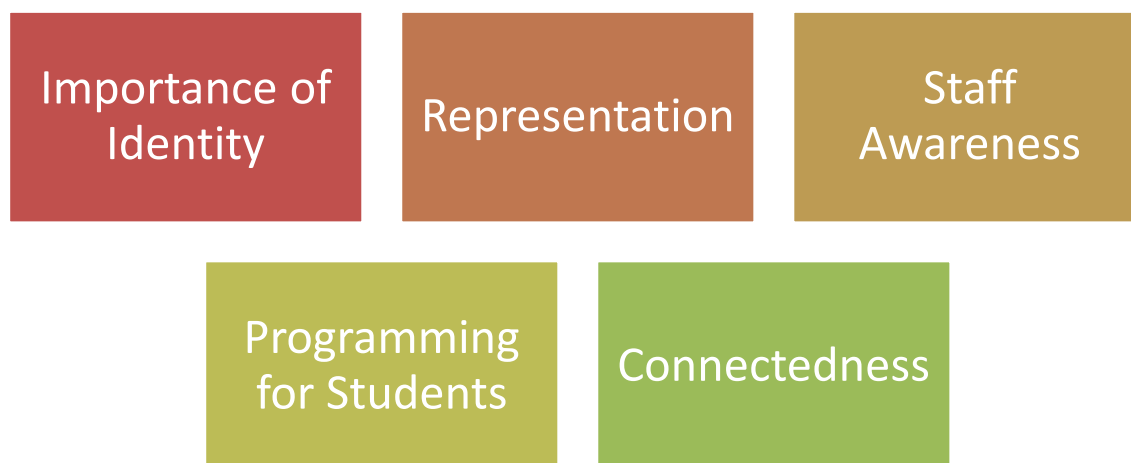
The importance of identity

Consistent with literature on the importance of identity within the educational system (e.g., a review study on the role of school in adolescents' identity development by Verhoeven, Poorthuis, & Volman, 2019), the sense of identity in schools was an overarching theme as stated by both students and parents during focus group discussions. Narratives on the importance of identity, the impact of the school system on their sense of identity, and the challenges that prevent students from feeling and doing their best in school were derived

> *"Identity is complex – it puts you into a community but emphasises your individuality."*

from focus group discussions. Variation in how identity is valued by those who do not identify "like them" was evident among participants. It was evident that participants highlighted the importance of identity and that it gives them meaning and a sense of belonging. At the same time, participants acknowledged the complexity of identity. The concept of identity has become visible and relevant specifically due to diversity in societies. Self-identity is viewed as a critical step in the process of ensuring that students who self-identify are recognized and matched with appropriate educational programs and supports.

Participants attending focus group discussions had the opportunity to explore questions and discuss the importance of identity at length. Identity is linked in many different ways to self-esteem, confidence and understanding more about who you really are as an individual. When examining the importance of identity, the majority of participants stated that they need to be themselves and express their identity. They further said that their identity helps them to reinstate their culture. They learn more about themselves. According to participants, "Identity is complex – it puts you into a community but emphasises your individuality", "identity ensures cultural safety", "identity is something to be proud of" and "identity gives an individual a sense of purpose, and direction. One parent described identity from this perspective:

> *"Identity goes further than the nation you're from, clan, spirit name etc. Our generation had to deal with residential schools, my parents were scared of identity, and they thought it was witchcraft."*

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There was overwhelming agreement among the participants regarding the complexity of the concept of identity. While most spoke about the importance of identity in "grounding" them, and that it is one thing that an individual can own and feel special about, some indicated that the issues of identity promote stereotypes. A majority of participants emphasised that the District is aware of the unequal treatment received by students who have experienced racism and bias in the system. A community member pointed out that:

> "District has to acknowledge [that] harmful things have been happening and that we want change."

Further related to the issues around identity and its connection to the public school system, one of the parents shared that:

> "The school system created an identity crisis in my children. Our background, culture, and religion clash with values of school. Our kids are struggling with shaping their identities between conflicting values which result in a low sense of belonging and self-esteem. "

From the Indigenous community partner meeting, it was proposed that the District should "have a thorough understanding of cultural awareness", and "students need to be listened to" and know that there will be "action taken" by the school system. There was an overwhelming response suggesting that the system needs to improve representation of marginalized groups in teaching and non-teaching staff, and in educational leadership. The participants echoed the different layers of demographic factors such as culture, socialization, situational encounters, and skin colour influencing the individual's identity. There was overwhelming concerns of "tokenism" from students. This is consistent with shifts in opinion from marginalized students, who have changed from fighting within the school system with peers for their recognition to advocating for their recognition and equal treatment by staff.

Further, parents also cautioned the school board about the use of identity data. Some of the parents noted that the collection of identity-based data is important if it helps the student. However, if it is not used very well by people who are aware of different identities, it has the potential to isolate students more.

Representation

In the student focus group discussions, "representation matters, we need teachers who look like us" was a statement that resonated with many. It was clearly indicated by students that representation is central to feelings of belonging. They stated that when there are teachers who identify like them, they feel safe and that they have a trusted adult in the school. Some of the parents also pointed out that the lack of representation among staff members made students aware of the differences in how they were treated compared to their "white" counterparts.

Indigenous students felt that they are not fully reflected in the teaching staff and/or curriculum. Further, they reported that administrators have taken down Indigenous resources on the walls and not replaced them. Some also reported that they grew up in schools that are predominantly white; no representation of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit...in high school there is lot of discrimination and stereotype.

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In a similar vein, families of students from other marginalized groups also expressed concern that there is lack of diversity in staff and students and that they do not see themselves reflected in the staff population. One of these parents shared:

> *"…schools are doing a superficial level. The data shows that 43% of students are members of racial groups but only 8% is staff. On an international day, Caucasian teachers represent different nations, which is funny. Hiring practices are keeping the school board "white."*

Parents of Indigenous students were also asked about their experience regarding the representation at schools. Responses suggested that there is no representation of Indigenous people in the school system. This has created lack of understanding by many people and promoted discrimination and stereotype, specifically in high school. Consequently, the limited exposure to positive representation at schools impact students' sense of belonging severely. The lack of representation at schools threatens students' identities in the classroom resulting in decreased feelings of school belonging and negatively impacting academic performance (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Moving forward, the District will need to find ways to increase representation of diverse groups in its employees.

Staff Awareness

There were lots of discussions about the role of the school system in shaping student's identity. Across groups, participants expressed the need for the school system to change and "listen" to students. Students expressed that there are low expectations from the school staff specifically for minority students:

> *"…teachers hold you back, and want you to know your place…you score good marks, you are accused of plagiarism…they assume we are dumb."*

Indigenous students reported that treatment at school changes once they declared their identity. They felt that the school authorities do not listen to them. Teachers are ignorant and use trauma as teaching opportunities. For example, one of the students pointed out:

> *"Opportunities that were open to me when teachers thought I was White have now been closed. Now that people know I am Indigenous, teachers expect me to only work on Indigenous topics and issues. Being Indigenous is treated like a disability."*

A parent of one of our students said that "Lack of understanding and connection creates intimidation and assumptions about intelligence and capability of others. It is difficult to live like that, when you are always fighting to prove yourself."

When asked about the impact of the school system on shaping students identity, a high school student reported that "the school system is not shaping my identity. It is my reaction to the school system…school system still treat residential school as a history project instead of something that still

hurts people today." Further another parent reported that "Teachers need more support to be able to accommodate for students. They don't have enough time, resources and space, to be able to treat and support students the way they need."

Taken together, the lack of complete understanding related to values that shape identity of students from marginalized groups and limited staff awareness were identified as pervasive issues within the school system. This lack of understanding inhibits the ability to support students from diverse cultures and communities. Further, the research on the identity development at schools shows that schools and teachers may *unintentionally* convey messages to students about who they should be through differentiation and selection, teaching strategies, teacher expectations, and peer norms (Verhoeven et al., 2019).

Programming for Students

Focus group participants reported several barriers related to programming for students that interfere with their benefitting from the education system. Examination of responses from participants indicates a clear pattern associated with barriers to programming/streaming practices in schools. One of the parents reported that:

> *"My son was forced to go to applied courses, children are being misled. I had to take him out of the public school system and continued with the home schooling. He is doing great at the university now."*

Further, the majority of students also indicated that the programs that are taught or delivered in some of the classes (e.g., English literature, social studies, law classes) have curriculum content that is outdated. Where attempts have been made to teach about the Indigenous education, students stated that "administrators have taken down Indigenous resources on walls and not replaced them." Additionally, one of the parents of an indigenous student shared her perspective regarding the curriculum as follows:

> *"the curriculum shows outdated racially stereotyped images of Indigenous communities… When the word Indian is used, teachers don't always look to correct it. When the Inuit national anthem is sung in the morning, teachers do not stop children from making fun of throat singing."*

Some students also emphasized the importance of mental health support at schools and expressed their concerns with the lack of mental health services available at school. Many students reported not having a trusted adult at the school with whom to discuss mental health issues One of the students shared that:

> *"They (referring to educators) do not understand the reasons why students miss school or submit assignments late due to mental health issues."*

Many parents of students with special needs and mental health issues who attended the focus groups sessions expressed similar concerns about assumptions, values, and limitations. These parents identified limited staff knowledge of visible and invisible disabilities such as life threatening asthma/allergies as one of the biggest barriers that hinder their children's academic success. They also added that teaching and non-teaching staff's limited knowledge regarding students' special needs and Individual Education Plan (IEP) result in "treating everyone the same" or a lack of action on the part of school staff, as described by this parent:.

> *"My child was diagnosed with Dyspraxia- lots of work done to identify and then nothing happens after that."*

Accessibility within heritage buildings is also a significant barrier to students and parents with disabilities, yet they cannot be changed. Taken together, the findings suggest that there are prevalent barriers to programming for students within the school system that need to be addressed to help all students reach their full potential with respect to academic achievement and well-being.

Connectedness

Students' sense of connectedness at school is related to their academic achievement and well-being. The research on sense of belonging indicates that sense of belonging has a big impact on students' academic motivation (Goodenow, 1993) and thus is related to their academic outcomes (Becker & Luthar, 2002).

Students from focus groups reported that extra-curricular activities help them become more involved in schools. These students shared the examples of extra-curricular activities such as clubs and sports activities, cultural celebrations, and events like "Black Students Symposium" and "Indigenous Youth Symposium" as opportunities to help them connect with friends who identify like them and increase their sense of belonging. A parent reported:

> *"Lunch club allowed my child to have sense of belonging outside regular classroom with access to other peers in the school."*

Similarly some students shared that:

> *"..club and sports activities and, cultural celebrations are great opportunities to help us connect with friends who identify like us and increase our sense of belonging."*

These occasions create spaces where students find their community members, learn more about their cultures, and are able to socialize with their peers. The current research on schools' role in shaping students' feelings of connectedness also supports the idea of organizing various learning experiences to provide students with opportunities to explore different identities in a supportive climate at school (Verhoeven, Poorthuis, & Volman, 2019).

Conclusion

Understanding our students and factors that contribute to their academic success, well-being, ability to build resiliency and cherish their values are important principles for the District. The research on the relationship between students' identity, academic success, and well-being suggests that a relatively strong identity helps students to be more resilient, reflective, and autonomous in making important life decisions (e.g., Flum & Kaplan 2006; Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia 2010). Throughout the first phase of the identity-based data collection, the District wanted to better understand the challenges and successes that students experience in school. The importance of identity was a key finding, yet there were varying perspectives about what defines identity and how identity impacts students' school experience. As a second key theme, representation and advocating for the marginalized were among the key aspects of ensuring that students feel understood and were able to own their identity. Both students and parents propose interventions to engage student voice in problem solving, an idea supported by Day-Vines et al. (2007). For example, it was recommended by community partners that the District should find ways of eliminating "preconceived notions of what it means to be an immigrant" and "stop perpetuating cultural stereotypes". The third theme was related to barriers to programming and streaming for students. It is vital to create and encourage inclusive opportunities within schools to meet students varied needs and build further all-inclusive programs and streaming practices. Finally, the decreased level of perceived sense of belonging was another key issue discussed during the focus group discussions. Moving forward, considering strategies aimed at promoting greater sense of belonging is warranted. Ultimately, the District must find better ways and standards of practice that will help us identify equitable and inclusive ways for improving student achievement and well-being.

Next Step

This work was considered an important first step in seeking community input to help inform thinking about how the collection of identity based data could help to overcome systemic barriers and identity-based disparities. The information gathered from the community partner meetings, students, parents/families focus group discussions will be used in planning for the collection of the identity-based data in November 2019. We have listened to what community partners, parents/families, as well as students have told us. Moving forward, the District will continue in its on-going efforts to seek feedback on the survey questions and process for the Identity-Based Data Collection.

Further, the District currently reports on a range of student data, such as program enrolment, graduation rates, special education supports, suspensions and expulsions. Identity-based data will enhance the District's capacity to understand areas of strength and need for particular student populations. The collection of Identity-Based data will allow for the linkage of survey data to other administrative data (e.g., achievement data, suspension data, course participation rates, etc.) in order to respond to the following types of questions:

• Who are the students who lack a sense of belonging at school? What are some strategies schools could try that would create a more inclusive environment for students?

• Who are the students who feel disengaged from school? (e.g., attendance patterns)

• Who are the students who are most likely to be enrolled in academic, or applied, level courses? Who do students turn to most often when deciding which courses to take?

• Are some students suspended at a higher rate compared to others? If so, who are they?

• Which students report not feeling safe at school?

- Which groups of students perform below the provincial standard on measures of achievement (e.g., provincial assessments, report card)?

- Are there some students who are less likely to attain full credit accumulation in grade 9, 10, etc. that would limit their ability to graduate with their peers?

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Key Project Timelines and Tasks

Working with a survey distribution period of 26 November through 13 December, major project timelines and key tasks are as follows:

Time Period	Key Tasks
May – June 2019	- Community Partner Meetings - Focus Groups with Students and Parents
July – August 2019	- Analysis of Data from Focus Groups - Preparation of Summary Report from Focus Groups - Draft Survey Development
September – October 2019	Stakeholder consultation to provide status update and seek input on process/plans moving forward and engagement strategies of their respective communities (e.g., Community Partners, IAC, ACE, SEAC, PIC)
October – November 2019	- System readiness training (CCDI modules) - Memo to school principals (purpose, process, timelines, etc.) - Pilot administration with small sample of schools/grades; analysis of pilot data; refinement of survey tool(s) - Communications with parents, students and community
November 26 – December 13, 2019	Survey Administration
December 2019 – January 2020	Acknowledgement/Appreciation/Notice of Next Steps
January – April 2020	- Data analysis - Stakeholder consultation
May/June 2020	Release of preliminary results
September 2020 - beyond	Inclusion of survey data in other analysis and reporting (ASAR, suspensions, etc)