

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EQUITY REPORT

**April 29, 2021**

**6:00 pm**

**Zoom Meeting**

**Voting Members:** Ayan Karshe (Chair), Nasrin Javanfar, Seema Lamba, Bronwyn Funiciello, Ryan Doucette (Young Leaders Advisory Council), Maria Teresa Garcia (Ottawa Community Immigrant Services), Chandonette Johnson (Jaku Konbit)

**Non-Voting Members:** Elaine Hayles, Bob Dawson, Said Mohamed, Yazhuo Zhang, Inini McHugh (Indigenous Education Advisory Committee), Rob Campbell (Trustee), Justine Bell (Trustee), Susan Cowin (Special Education Advisory Committee), Breanna Pizzuto (Spiritual Care in Secondary Schools)

**Staff and Guests:** Donna Blackburn (Trustee), Lynn Scott (Trustee), Michael Carson (Chief Financial Officer), Shannon Smith (Superintendent of Instruction), Mary Jane Farrish (Superintendent of Instruction), Kevin Gardner (Manager, Financial Services) Jessica Young (Vice Principal, Canterbury High School), Melissa Collins (System Principal, Equity), Sue Rice (Equity Instructional Coach), David Sutton (OCDSB Instructor), Jeannine Bradley (OCDSB Instructor) Susan Gardner Susan Gardner (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), Joy Liu (Student Trustee), Leigh Fenton (Board/Committee Coordinator), and Kathryn Desplanque (Guest).

### 1. Welcome

Chair Karshe opened the meeting at 6:07 p.m.

She acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on the unceded, unsundered Territory of the Anishinaabeg Algonquin Nation, whose presence reaches back to time immemorial and to this present moment. She stated that as settlers, immigrants, migrants and visitors on their land, may the meeting participants seek to honour the Algonquin people as its rightful stewards and keepers.

She noted the shared goal of the committee to protect and support all children, with a focus on those who are oppressed by colonial systems. She urged participants to enter the space with humility and compassion, and in conversation

to seek to center Black children, Indigenous children, children of colour, children with special needs, LGBTQA2I children and children living below the poverty line.

She expressed hope that while participants seek to change schools for the better, that they also create a space for those people who have also experienced the consequences of white supremacy and systemic racism, in the past and in the present.

2. Approval of the Agenda

**Moved by Nasrin Javanfar,**

**THAT the agenda be approved.**

**Carried**

3. Community Discussion - Open Space

3.1 Newcomers to Canada Navigating the Public School System (M. Garcia and N. Javanfar)

Ms. Javanfar, a former multicultural liaison officer (MLO) in Toronto, Ontario, presented a slideshow to initiate discussions among school staff and policy makers to provide support for students and their families from the Middle East. The content in the presentation was linked to the findings in Report 21-014, Analysis of Disproportionality and Disparity in Grade 10 Credit Accumulation, where only 77.5% of students identifying as Middle Eastern accumulate 16 credits by the end of grade 10. She highlighted the structure of the education system in the Middle Eastern countries: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel and Palestine Territories, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and Iran. The children from these countries work within a highly competitive and teacher-centred school environment, without group assignments or long-term projects. The focus in the Middle Eastern school system is mainly focused on cognitive and language development. When teaching these children in Canada, staff is challenged due to a lack of knowledge about the student's culture, parent's expectations and lack of information about the student's educational background or age grouping. She offered the following suggestions to help address the barriers to success for Middle Eastern children:

- Use community media to connect with parents;
- Provide ongoing cultural training for school staff;
- Enlist Middle Eastern high school students to mentor elementary students; and

- Connect with successful community members in different trades and professions to provide support for high school students.

Ms. Javanfar emphasized the importance of connecting with communities to ensure that they are aware of the variety of activities and initiatives being offered by the District and promoted on the website.

Ms. Garcia mentioned that in the ACE meeting of 27 May 2021, she will provide the committee with a presentation of the work being undertaken at the District to support newcomers to schools who are navigating the public school system.

In response to comments during the presentation and in discussion, the following points were noted:

- It is important to listen more and assume less when introducing students, who come from elsewhere in the world, to study in Canada;
- The MLO program provides settlement and interpretation services to students, parents, and school staff at OCDSB schools;
- Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) offers MLOs who visit all schools in Ottawa. They perform translation services and provide cultural interpretation between staff and parents;
- The MLO program is funded by Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and in part by the District;
- For a future ACE meeting, identify the ways in which the District is directly making community connections to help Middle Eastern students find success;
- In the recent Student Senate budget discussion, the issue of a limited ratio of translators to students was raised;
- Develop a translated package for newcomer families, illustrating and describing the support available in the District, along with the community resources;
- Sourcing culturally sensitive mental health resources continues to be a challenge for students attempting to access these supports; and
- Build summer transition supports for newcomer families. Public school may be a lone point of contact for these families with Canadian society.

#### 4. Reports

##### 4.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Smith reported that her portfolio consists of Continuing Education. She shared that, stemming directly from the identity-based data collection, a new grade nine academic English course will be open to all learners who identify as Black, African and Caribbean descent over the summer months, regardless of their past performance in English courses. The course will be re-written to highlight Black excellence, connecting to community, mentoring and student identity. Approximately 5000 students across the District enroll in summer programs. As a starting point, these courses will be offered in the summer; however, the goal is to influence the practice across the District within the regular school year. A team of writers to assist with the course plan includes representatives from the Ottawa Black Educators Network, Black graduation coaches, and English Department Heads. Engagement has been sought from community partners and through those partnerships, experiential learning opportunities have been created for the students entering the course. The neighbourhood outreach team, the Youth Futures program and the Boys and Girls Club have agreed to assist with circulating information about the program. She highlighted that Dr. Clyde Ledbetter from Jaku Konbit has been approached to provide the District with valuable feedback to be integrated into the program. In addition, Dr. Carl James, who holds the Jean Augustine Chair in Community, Education and Diaspora at York University has been consulted on the creation of the program.

Ms. Hayles contributed that in the Black community there is a stigma, by association, with the concept of school over the summer holiday. Superintendent Smith clarified that the program is a "reach ahead" summer credit program for students transitioning from grade 8 into grade 9. She disclosed that part of the reason for the specific programming was motivated from student feedback who expressed concern about successful outcomes for themselves in high school.

In response to a query on student recruitment from Ms. Lamba, Superintendent Smith submitted that materials will be distributed across school sites and videos are being made for the District website. Initial outreach will be towards those students identified by Black graduation coaches as those who would benefit from further enrichment in an academic English course before entering high school.

Ms. Johnson-Arowolo expressed concern of a potential struggle to have enough time to read and digest the material assigned over a short period, particularly for boys, as shown in studies on the reading gender gap. Superintendent Smith shared that depending on the COVID-19 safety precaution recommendations, a plan is in place to allow for in-class instruction on a daily basis. Time allocated to digest the material is currently more than the students have in the quadmester system. The ratios in class will be kept to 1 teacher to 15 students. She explained that

after examining the English curriculum, many of the expectations can be met in innovative ways, such as a short film or a podcast celebrating identity.

Ms. Desplanque pursued the question of identity for the teachers of a Black excellence class. Superintendent Smith underscored that the hiring of Black educators is a priority. Ms. Bradley agreed that hiring Black teacher role models is a practice to be greatly prioritized. Alongside the Ottawa Black Educator Network, Ms. Bradley noted the Somali Teachers Network and Jaku Konbit as organizations to connect with in a search for teacher candidates suitable to teach the program.

a. Valuing Voices: Identity Matters Survey Reporting

Superintendent Smith stated that a third Valuing Voices: Identity Matters Survey report, linking student outcomes to identity collected through the Valuing Voices Survey will be presented to Committee of the Whole (COW) on 8 June 2021 and will focus more broadly on student achievement and streaming at both the elementary and secondary level. In the fall of 2021, a fourth report examining identity and sense of belonging in school will be available.

In response to a query about the timing of material going to COW in advance of the advisory committees, Superintendent Smith stated that the reports will be shared with ACE, however the District reports are handled differently from the consultation processes.

4.2 ACE Report, 25 February 2021

**Moved by Elaine Hayles,**

**THAT the Advisory Committee on Equity Report of 25 February 2021 be received.**

**Carried**

As part of business arising from the report of 25 February 2021, Ms. Hayles noted that a concern was raised that students accessing special education supports could be augmented in the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap 2020-2023. The Advisory Committee on Equity Report of 25 February 2021 states on folio 4: "The Roadmap includes support and programs for students with exceptional needs. Detailed information can be found in the OCSDB's annual Special Education Plan, published on the website."

Chair Karshe announced that the Special Education Advisory Committee invited the ACE Chairs to attend a meeting on 7 April 2021. Connections between the chairs of various advisory groups are occurring. She noted

that should ACE decide to discuss the goals of the Roadmap, a process can be formalized.

#### 4.3 Committee of the Whole Report

Ms. Lamba reported that the Equitable Recruitment, Hiring and Promotion Policy was discussed in the COW meetings of 6 April 2021 and 20 April 2021. The policy was approved by the Board of Trustees on 27 April 2021. Chair Karshe expressed her gratitude towards Ms. Lamba for leading the consultation on policy revisions with the committee.

At the April 6th meeting, there was a discussion on Universal Screening Tool. COW discussed what factors should be considered to inform the exploration of universal screener and how a tool would ensure equity for racialized and minoritized students. ACE members expressed interest in hosting a presentation on the Universal Screening Tool to be supported by the Learning Support Services Team. There was a request to obtain data on the identities of students in each of the Specialized Program Classes (SPCs).

Two Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPBSA) resolutions were discussed recommending increased COVID-19 gap funding and funding for anti-racism data research. ACE members expressed their support of these recommendations.

Chair Karshe noted that the COW meetings are accessible to the public via the YouTube live stream on the District's events calendar website. For a full meeting report refer to the website under Board of Trustees, Agendas and Minutes.

### 5. Presentations

#### 5.1 The OCDSB Budget Process Overview and Equity Funding (M. Carson)

Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Carson presented details on the 2020-2021 revised estimates and the 2021-2022 budget process, highlighting a comparative summary of revenues and expenses, net results and accumulated surplus, information on education funding in Ontario, a COVID-related funding update and OCDSB budget assumptions.

CFO Carson explained that the District is required, by law, to present a balanced budget. The Ministry allows for school boards to budget for a deficit approximately equal to 1% of the overall budget. For the 2020-2021 school year approximately \$45 million in funding was received to offset COVID-19 related expenditures. Various uncertainties in an unusual year, resulted in low student enrolment, especially in kindergarten, with 1600 less students than anticipated. The loss of students impacted staffing. The province provided an additional \$50 million to be attributed to supports and emerging issues. He highlighted that with the additional \$6 million in

funding was used for the purchase of additional Chromebooks, other technology equipment and internet hotspots. The expenditures on these pieces of equipment will strengthen the technology fleet for future years.

CFO Carson noted that the Financial Services team awaits the announcements of the provincial Grants for Student Needs (GSNs) for the 2021-2022 school year. Until the final grant information is received, it continues to be a challenge to contemplate any flexibility in the budget for the coming year. The funding for additional custodial support in the daytime, technology optimization, ventilation enhancements, and additional teaching positions will not continue. Staff will present a budget that makes the assumption for the best scenario for a safe return to school for the 2021-2022 school year with the prospect that the province will show a commitment to the plan.

In response to the committee request to parse out equity spending at the District, Financial Services staff produced a chart for GSNs based on the allocations from the 2019-2020 school year. He identified the grants with the largest equity components:

- Special Education: \$100 million;
- English as a Second Language: \$60 million;
- Indigenous Education: \$16 million; and
- Continuing Education: \$11 million.

Priorities and Partnership Fund (PPF) allocations support students with mental health needs, student success opportunities, and engaging parents and communities. The PPF supported the hiring of a Human Rights and Equity Advisor.

In the future, the Financial Services team aims to be able to generate reporting against District objectives. For example, there is a specific amount of money allocated per month that is made available to support students who would not otherwise qualify for transportation. Currently these funds are not reported as part of an equity expenditure. Tracking expenditures on equity support will take some time and added staff resources, however forging linkages to specific initiatives is being considered.

In terms of the subsidization for programs and operations using an equity lens, CFO Carson clarified that salaries are the District's largest expenditure. Staff salaries account for 60% of the overall budget. There is a conscious effort to avoid relying simply on numbers, but rather to look at financial matters from a holistic perspective. CFO Carson advised that conversations with staff and the school community help prioritize the needs within schools.

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

- Additional funds have been allocated to support graduation and instructional coaching initiatives in schools;
- There are some restrictions on funding envelopes from the Ministry, that have specific, "sweatered" funds which must go directly to the intended program, for example, Indigenous Education or Special Education;
- Departments within the school board receive funding based on their objectives, working towards the common goal of improving student success;
- The superintendents of instruction have been directed to review the way their departmental budgets align with the goals of the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap 2020-2023;
- A request was made to produce a report on how the initiatives of the Roadmap will be funded. CFO Carson stated that this information would be part of the broader budget discussions at COW, Budget.
- CFO explained that the District is working under the assumption that there is a requirement to allocate resources to the position of the Human Rights and Equity Advisor, along with identifying funds to support an administrative assistant position to support the Advisor;
- CFO noted that as the budget is set with certain limitations, new funding must be considered by decreasing an established funding focus in other areas of the organization;
- Should the OPSBA 2021 resolution to recommend that the Ministry of Education undertake a commitment to fund an additional grant for two full-time equivalent research officers fail, the District will shift internal resources to continue anti-racism data research;
- The OPSBA 2021 resolution to promote further COVID-19 gap funding was prepared in response to the province's encouragement that school boards use more than 1% of their own financial reserves to address potential COVID-19 expenditures for the 2021-2022 school year;
- A proposition for maintaining the level of funding for mental health supports, as were allocated as a response to COVID-19. The concern was that there will be a greater need for mental health supports as the pandemic-stressors have not subsided; and
- A suggestion to provide additional funding for the Authentic Student Learning Experience Tool (ASLE) as the project is making an impact



on Indigenous students by focusing on student voice and learning recovery plans that take into account the students interests.

Chair Karshe noted that there is a potential to engage on the budget topic through a sub-committee. She encouraged the committee members to register their interest by sending her an email.

## 6. Standing Items

### 6.1 Update from Steering Committee Representatives on Police Involvement in Schools

The item was deferred until 27 May 2021.

### 6.2 Safe Schools Policy and Code of Conduct Policy Phase II Consultation (M.J. Farrish)

The Code of Conduct Policy, Safe Schools Policy (Managing Student Behaviour) and Safe Schools Policy (Emergency Preparedness and Response) were sent to ACE for independent review on 21 April 2021.

Superintendent Farrish and Vice Principal Young presented a slideshow reviewing the safe schools and code of conduct policy consultations. During Phase I of the consultation process, several types of focus groups were formed: students, student senate, parents and guardians, multicultural liaison officers, school administrators and federation partners. Shared themes, which appeared often, were mental health and well-being of students and staff, greater need to monitor bullying in schools, addressing racial slurs, homophobia and sexism, dress code, defining the role of police in schools. Major revisions to the policies were shared. These revisions were made through discussion with the District Human Rights and Equity Advisor to provide an equity lens for inclusion, along with the integration of these policies with the Human Rights Policy currently being written.

Ms. Hayles expressed the concern that these policies affect the lives of the BIPOC student body; however Staff assigned to the policy team is composed of those who identify as predominantly White or of European Descent. She queried the extent of the involvement of Coordinator of Equity, Jacqueline Lawrence. Superintendent Farrish noted that part of the consultation outreach engaged Staff leads to identify affinity groups of students. Ms. Lawrence's student group was included in the fall/winter 2019 consultation process and the student group has been included again in phase 2 process by sharing the revised policies with them for input and feedback. Superintendent Farrish clarified that Staff do not approve the policies; the Board of Trustees approve policies.

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

- The Code of Conduct Policy applies uniformly to all District schools;
- The Code of Conduct Policy includes language pertaining to dress code;
- A standalone Modified Days Policy is underdevelopment;
- The way that a student may report cases of infractions under these policies will be outlined in an official set of procedures, to be revised at a later date;
- Superintendent Farrish confirmed that the Human Rights Policy in development will be the governing policy; thereby being the overarching policy to guide all other policies pertaining to the rights of people.
- The Ministry requires certain specific policy documents kept by school boards;
- Under the guidance of the Human Rights and Equity Coordinator, language is to be included in the policies that highlight accountability for the administration of these policies at the school level; and
- Mechanisms to pursue the parameters of the policies are to be included. For example, a parent or guardian may wish to appeal a suspension. Information on the appeal process will be included in the procedures.

Many of the members left the meeting and quorum was lost at 9:01 p.m.

Ms. Lamba queried how these policies will address the issue of White principals implementing policies within targeted communities, as the data from OCDSB suspension reporting demonstrates higher rates of suspension for marginalized students. She requested a comparison between where the language has specifically changed between the original policy and the newly proposed policies. She noted that the highlights of changes came forward in the presentation but her preference would be to see the words, as words express meaning. Additionally she requested to learn the reasons why the changes occurred and to see how the policy makers put their minds to the relevant issues and attempts to address these issues through changes in policies. Vice Principal Young stated that ways that these issues will be addressed in the rollout of the policies will include professional learning and development in the fall.

Superintendent Farrish stated that due to the timelines, they would not be able to commit to line-by-line tracked changes to the policy. She added that significant decisions were made to examine over 40 policies and procedures pertaining to safe schools with the intent to streamline

practice. She urged the committee to read the policies and provide feedback on any potential missing elements.

Trustee Campbell noted that seeing the substantive changes to the policies is important. In response to Trustee Campbell's inquiry on whether the policy consultation can be extended to the fall, Superintendent Farrish noted that the consultation plan and timelines for the rewriting of these policies had been approved by the Board of Trustees earlier in the year. She added that shifting timelines delays the implementation of the policy; however the important part of these consultations is collecting a variety of opinions and ensuring that the policy is available for feedback and input from all stakeholder groups.

Trustee Scott noted that the timetable for the recommendation of the Safe School Policies to come to the COW agenda is in June; however, if more time is required the dates may be extended.

7. New Business and Event Announcements

7.1 Proposed Advisory Committee on Equity Meeting Schedule 2021-2022

The item was deferred until 27 May 2021.

8. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:21 p.m.

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Ayan Karshe

Chair, Advisory Committee on Equity