

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EQUITY REPORT

May 27, 2021

6:00 pm

Zoom Meeting

- Voting Members:** Ayan Karshe (Chair), Deepika Grover (Co-Chair), Nasrin Javanfar, Seema Lamba, Bronwyn Funicello, Carrie-Lynn Barkley, Maria Teresa Garcia (Ottawa Community Immigrant Services), Chandonette Johnson (Jaku Konbit), Kahmaria Pingue (Parents for Diversity), Kathryn Owens (Youth Services Bureau)
- Non-Voting Members:** Elaine Hayles, Bob Dawson, June Girvan, Yazhuo Zhang, Inini McHugh (Indigenous Education Advisory Committee), David Wildman (Ottawa Carleton Elementary Occasional Teacher's Association), Rob Campbell (Trustee), Justine Bell (Trustee)
- Staff and Guests:** Christine Boothby (Trustee), Donna Blackburn (Trustee), Lynn Scott (Trustee), Dorothy Baker (Superintendent of Instruction), Shawn Lehman (Superintendent of Instruction), Melissa Collins (System Principal, Equity), Sue Rice (Equity Instructional Coach), David Sutton (OCDSB Instructor), Kenneth Mak (OCDSB Instructor), Jeannine Bradley (OCDSB Instructor), Joy Liu (Student Trustee), Kyla Gibson (OCDSB Student), Alador Bereketab (OCDSB Student), Hamza Darar (Rajo Presenter), Oksana Kravets (OCDSB Communications Department), Christian McCuaig (OCDSB Communications Department), and Leigh Fenton (Board/Committee Coordinator).

1. Welcome

Co-chair Karshe called the meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

She acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on the unceded, unsundered Territory of the Anishinaabeg Algonquin Nation whose presence in Canada reaches back to time immemorial. She extended deep gratitude and sought to support and affirm Indigenous rights as the land's stewards and keepers.

Co-chair Grover reflected on the shared goal of the Advisory Committee on Equity (ACE): To protect and support all children in schools and to advocate for those who experience oppression that is connected to the on-going, colonial legacy within the public education system. She welcomed committee members to

enter the space with humility, compassion and intersectional insight, while seeking to center the needs of Black children, Indigenous children, children of colour, children with special needs, LGBTQA2I children, and families living below the poverty line. Though they are often diminished by those with greater power and authority, these children are remarkably intelligent, kind, and funny. She noted the importance of seeking to see these children in their full humanity, as individuals rather than a target group or data point.

Co-chair Grover, drew attention to the space held for one another, remembering that the current moment represents parallel pandemics of COVID-19, targeted anti-Asian violence, and continued police violence against Black and Indigenous Peoples. She marked the sombre one-year anniversary of the murder of George Floyd, and remembered the catalytic, mass Black Lives Matter marches that followed, in Canada and internationally. She recognized the six month anniversary of the farmers' protests in India, now coupled with a pandemic health crisis raging across that subcontinent. She highlighted the escalation of violence in Gaza, another devastating chapter in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Through these constant reminders, 2020-2021 has illustrated the point that the world is complex, people are interdependent, and struggles for liberation and justice are interconnected. OCDSB students and families come from all over the world.

On a special note, Co-chair Grover stated that these past months have brought attention to the incredible efforts of anti-racist and anti-oppressive educators within the District and within the Province. She recognized these educators for their exemplary professionalism and for the creative ways in which they continue to teach in the classroom. She indicated solidarity with anti-racist educators, and acknowledged the daily risks they take in ensuring that diverse perspectives are available to classroom and societal learners. ACE will work with the Board to pursue the achievement of the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Roadmap (the Roadmap), recognizing anti-racist and anti-oppressive educators as key system assets.

The co-chairs wished Superintendent Baker a heartfelt, well-earned retirement.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Maria Teresa Garcia,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

3. Information Items

3.1 Proposed Advisory Committee on Equity Meeting Schedule 2021-2022

The ACE meeting schedule for the school year 2021-2022 was presented in draft form and adopted by consensus.

3.2 Update from Steering Committee Representatives on Police Involvement in Schools

Ms. Pingue reported that she and Ms. Sweeney were the ACE representatives on the steering committee for the Review on Police Involvement in Schools. The effectiveness of the School Resource Officer (SRO) program has not been subject to review since its inception approximately twenty years ago.

Human Rights and Equity Advisor (HREA) Carolyn Tanner is an arm's length-community, human rights and equity advisor, employed by OCDSB and commissioned to research and develop a report. As part of the data collection process, HREA Tanner arranged focus groups and individual consultations with families. In addition, a consultation survey was distributed to the broader community. Two SROs participated in the consultations, along with a staff sergeant responsible for the SRO program.

Ms. Pingue shared that some of the most commonly reported incidents exposed the harm caused by interactions with SROs, including the impact of police presence on safety, the stigma associated with police presence, the probability of criminalizing the actions of children, and negative experiences encountered by both marginalized and LGBTQA2I students. Ms. Pingue reported that overall, the members of the steering committee were pleased with the report and commended HREA Tanner on her work.

Final report recommendations will include revisions to Policy, P. 043.SCO Police Involvement in Schools and Procedure, PR.533.SCO Police Involvement in Schools and to reallocate the funds from the SRO program to culturally competent, community-based resources to support students.

The final report will remain confidential until the Board of Trustees have had an opportunity to review the material contained in the 8 June Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting agenda package.

Ms. Pingue noted that delegations from the community are welcome; however members of ACE must communicate their comments and questions to Ms. Lamba who sits at COW as the ACE representative. Ms. Lamba will share the ACE perspective.

In response to a query from Trustee Bell, Trustee Scott noted that the recommendations will come to Committee for the Whole on 8 June 2021 for information and discussion, not as a formal motion.

4. Community Discussion - Open Space

4.1 Newcomers to Canada Navigating the Public School System - Part 2 (M. Garcia)

Ms. Garcia delivered a presentation on the Multicultural Liaison Officer (MLO) Program within the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB). Explained in the presentation was the role of the MLO, newcomer student challenges, the different languages spoken by MLOs and community facilitators, resources and activities used by MLOs, along with suggestions on how the District can help make the MLO Program increasingly successful. She highlighted that the goals of the program are to both help ensure the successful integration of immigrant children and their families, who are new to Canada in Ottawa schools and to help encourage understanding between newcomer families and schools, as well as to provide information on settlement services to newcomer families.

In response to a query by Mr. Dawson, Ms. Garcia noted that there is an MLO presence officially in 83 schools and each MLO serves in three or four brick and mortar schools. Seven MLOs are assigned to the Ottawa-Carleton Virtual (OCV) campuses. She confirmed a need to hire more MLOs and hire educators who are multi-lingual.

Superintendent Baker noted her awareness of the need to expand on abilities to serve students. Currently, the District is in communication with Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OSISO) to examine ways to work together and broaden the engagement with families, together with elevating interpretation strategies. Ms. Garcia clarified that when OSISO receives a request for assistance, the request is assigned to an MLO or an interpreter; the interpreters transliterate a suite of languages, which are different from the 18 languages used in MLO services. In the 2020-2021 school year, 222 service calls were accepted by interpreters.

Ms. Javanfar observed that a large part of the MLO role is building a bridge between cultures. She noted that MLOs must travel through the city to provide their services to the various assigned schools. The MLOs are preventative in their work, for example, conducting mental health wellness checks and reducing the levels of distress for families in a new country. She suggested the addition of another 22 MLOs for the District to alleviate some of the exhaustion experienced by the current cohort of MLOs who support multiple schools simultaneously.

4.2 Mr. Hamza Darar, Program Manager of Rajo Project

Mr. Darar shared that The RAJO Project is a five-year community-based project that provides culturally sensitive services to Black youth and their families in Ottawa, Ontario and Edmonton, Alberta. It aims to address refugee trauma, increase mental health awareness and overall resilience. The RAJO Project integrates youth into schools, through meaningful recreation and cultural activities, as well as employment programs, and

promotes healthy family functioning. Mr. Darar's presentation examined the evidence-based model used to implement RAJO, the impact of RAJO to date, and the implication for research-informed programs similar to RAJO in community-centred and driven programs.

In response to questions during the discussion, the following points were noted:

- The RAJO Project's five-year pilot is funded federally. The project's manager is focused on acquiring provincial funding for the project's future stability; and
- The volume of information on the District website is a challenge for parents to navigate. It was recommended that a greater focus be placed on outreach from individual school administrators to parents and caregivers.

Co-chair Karshe concluded that the community discussion space on the agenda is purpose-built as a learning space for ACE to connect with the community, as a whole, and work with their networks to share information.

5. Presentations

5.1 Student Presentations

Co-chairs Karshe and Grover summarized their memorable visit to a Student Senate meeting in the spring, where the students discussed how to occupy colonial spaces. Plans were shared about organizing a town hall meeting and launching a bystanders training program to contribute to safer communities.

Ms. Bereketab, a secondary school student of Canterbury High School (CHS), shared her experiences as a student of the OCDSB, drawing attention to the importance of the Black Youth Forum held on Wednesdays and that the establishment of a weekly forum has contributed to the creation of a more inclusive space in schools. She commended her peers on the energy placed into the success of the Black Youth Forum event. She spoke about the creation of her own club, called "Let's Start Change". She noted that through starting up a new club and continuously having the majority of teachers and the administration support the event was a rewarding experience.

Ms. Bereketab is working closely with music associations in Canada to provide workshops, including the Suzuki Association of Ontario, Suzuki Associations of the Americas, and Bowed Arts Music School in Toronto. She made the following suggestions to staff in a workshop she hosted in-year at CHS, to address some gaps in creating a positive culture of equity, inclusion and diversity in the music program:

- Educators must educate themselves on the subjects they are responsible to teach, noting that some racism stems from ignorance; and
- There is a preference to being taught various topics by those who are connected to the subject matter. For example, the history of jazz music is a blend of cultural sensibilities; learning from someone who has awareness of and the enthusiasm for the cultural aspects of this particular form of music makes the learning more relevant to students.

Her student experience, as a Black girl attending CHS, was described as following:

- Microaggressions exist within the context of comments, by teachers, directed at students regarding physical appearance. Singling out students by using words like "exotic" does not contribute to a student's feeling of well-being because they already feel different;
- Teachers commenting or touching student's hair is inappropriate. It takes a lot of confidence for a Black girl to wear their hair curly at school because of the common occurrence of other students or staff feeling entitled to touch their hair, ask isolating questions or tell jokes based on stereotypes; and
- Being heard by teachers means a lot to students. She noted she had a dialogue with one teacher, at length, explaining that it is acceptable and non-threatening to refer to a person as "Black". Some educators are teaching the Black curriculum without being comfortable noting the colour of someone's skin.

She presented the following recommendations to administrators:

- Teachers require additional training on how to deescalate racism in schools. To only be able to see racism in its most obvious form renders one unable to detect it in their daily actions or belief system. Educators need to know "where the line is";
- Teachers admittedly have shared that sometimes they hear things that might be racist but do not know how to deescalate the situation so instead choose to observe to see if the students will resolve it themselves. Teachers need to "step in" sooner;
- Holding people accountable for the words that are used in school settings should be a principle that is upheld by all;
- Teachers should feel comfortable when talking about Black history, injustices and empowerment; and

- Administration at every school should get involved where there is not a high enough student demand for a new inclusive initiative. Use the power of the administration in the school to amplify the voices of Black youth. Welcome larger events and encourage students to voice their opinions.

Ms. Gibson, a secondary school student at Lisgar Collegiate Institute, described her experience with diversity, equity and inclusion during COVID-19. She noted that some teachers are more willing to introduce conversations of equity in the 2020-2021 school year than in years previous. In future she would like to hear more conversations centered on student diversity in classrooms and train teachers to deliver the material to help all students understand the material with sensitivity. She would like to see a curriculum promoting diversity in a meaningful way, through literature and class activities. She recommended that educators take more opportunities to partner with students and engage in outreach, providing students with a platform to express themselves.

Ms. Gibson shared one of her proud moments of her high school career: she wrote about her experience in an OCDSB English course in *The Lisgarwrite*, a student-run newspaper. The article, called "Four Years of Shakespeare", described the need to update the English curriculum to allow students who identify as Black, Asian, Middle Eastern and Indigenous to feel represented. She noted that only being able to register for one Indigenous literature class was not adequate. In her writing she attested to the importance of learning about the Indigenous experience in Canada. Referencing "The Lord of the Flies", she noted that she does not need to learn more about White, male supremacy, which tells the story of a group of boys in a hierarchical order who fight for power and degrade one another. "Four Years of Shakespeare" led to the removal of "The Lord of the Flies" from the OCDSB English curriculum.

Ms. Gibson presented two expositions that her club, "Stay Woke" had created: "This is Just the Beginning" and "Discrimination in the Classroom", a visual aid to help staff and students prevent racism and discrimination in the classroom. On 25 May 2021, the one-year anniversary of George Floyd's murder, approximately 250 students from the Ottawa Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) participated in a virtual walkout from classes. The walkout not only commemorated George Floyd, but also sought to maintain the momentum for the Black Lives Matter movement that started a year ago. Event organizers hosted a virtual assembly, called "This is Just the Beginning", featuring spoken word poetry, educational talks on the walkout's calls to action and a video of George Floyd's family upon hearing the guilty verdict for former police officer, Derek Chauvin.

The calls to action for the OCDSB are listed as follows:

- To commit to rebuilding high school instructional materials by:
 1. Implementing more life-affirming and Black-centred, diverse and inclusive material;
 2. Eliminating the centering of White voices in high school materials; and
 3. Providing Professional Development (PD) to teachers on the selection, value, and use of inclusive materials.
- To eliminate the presence of SROs in order to produce a safer environment for Black, Indigenous and other marginalized students
 1. The OCDSB can offer considerable support to youth by affirming that schools are a place for learning and rapport building, for example, offer food banks, clothing, and spaces for visiting community elders.
- To ensure Black students receive guidance, mental health support and resources from Black counsellors.
 1. Commit to hiring Black teachers, guidance counsellors, social workers, psychologists, speech language pathologists, vice principals and principals using definitive goals and timelines;
 2. Establish culturally-responsive resources and directories for community-based mental health supports as a bridge until those counsellors can be retained by the school board;
 3. Develop formal relationships with community partners to ensure engaging mentorship opportunities; and
 4. Connect with outreach offices in traditionally Black colleges.
- To increase communication with Black students by:
 1. Requiring a round table discussion with student trustees, student senators, and the leaders of the Black student clubs; and
 2. Encouraging schools to start holding space for Black Student Clubs.

Committee members expressed their gratitude to the students who had come forward to share their experiences with ACE. Co-chair Karshe noted that for the 2021-2022 school year, ACE will centre student voice on the agendas as a primary focus.

6. Member Discussion

6.1 ACE Annual Report to the Board of Trustees

Diversity and Equity Coordinator Lawrence shared that ACE has an annual reporting requirement to the Board of Trustees that encompasses reporting on activities and achievements for the past year, a plan of

activities for the current year, membership details and a proposed meeting schedule. In the past all advisory committees presented to the Board at the final meeting in June. This year the process has changed where a written form is to be submitted for the Board of Trustees for the 22 June 2021 meeting agenda. The co-chairs of ACE will be provided with designated time at a Board of Trustee meeting during the school year 2021-2022 to deliver a presentation on plans and achievements.

Diversity and Equity Coordinator Lawrence led an open forum discussion on submissions for both activities and achievements in the 2020-2021 school year and committee plans for the 2021-2022 school year.

Activities and Achievements for the 2020-2021 School Year

- Successful transition from meeting in-person to virtual meetings, with high attendance and greater accessibility;
- The Integration of The Roadmap into a guiding document for the work of ACE;
- Leadership on submitting feedback for Policy P.146. HR, Equitable Recruitment, Hiring and Promotion;
- Building awareness of the specific needs of different minoritized people and different communities newly attending the Canadian school system;
- The ACE representative on the Committee of the Whole (COW), Ms. Lamba, attended all meetings and contributed regularly on behalf of ACE members, and subsequently delivered the COW report at ACE meetings; and
- Long time ACE member, Trustee Campbell, attested to the high engagement of ACE members in "insightful" conversations this year, crediting the involvement of the co-chairs, coordinators and committee members.

Plans for the 2021-2022

- Receiving updates on progress of The Roadmap to reach the established 2021-2022 milestones and outcomes;
- A greater number of Indigenous representatives on the membership of ACE;
- A desire to create an ACE meeting work plan that will include consultation on major District initiatives that have a significant impact on equity-deserving groups;

- A desire to create subcommittees for pertinent Board policy work and membership;
- A presentation from the Indigenous, Equity and Human Rights Division to learn about their structured equity analysis that is incorporated into policy development; and
- Amplifying student voices in meetings.

7. Reports

7.1 Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Baker highlighted the successes of the 27 May 2021 student-led Black Student Forum presentation on "A Year of Resistance and Resilience: Moving Forward with Clear Vision", the Indigenous Speaker's Series which spanned the duration of the 2020-2021 school year, the Original Voices Youth Council (OVYC) supporting Indigenous students and families, and the Rainbow Youth Forum. Equity Instructional Coach Rice reflected that the Rainbow Youth Forum was well-attended in the virtual setting, with approximately 140 participants and elementary students attending this year as a first time occurrence.

7.2 ACE Report, 29 April 2021

Moved by Carrie-Lynn Barkley,

THAT the Advisory Committee on Equity Report of 29 April 2021 be received.

Carried

7.3 Committee of the Whole Report

Ms. Lamba reported that at the COW meeting on 11 May 2021, a consultation plan was presented to review and revise Policy P.100.IT Appropriate Use of Technology. It was last revised in 2012. The policy outlines the "standards and expectations for the use of District technology, including networks, software, email, apps, devices and infrastructure." The policy governs both students and staff.

Ms. Lamba stated that the policy will impact equity-seeking students, staff, and families, in particular, the accessibility of the technology for low-income, immigrants and students with disabilities. She noted that it would be important that the consultation process include seeking input from marginalized communities within and outside of the District.

Ms. Lamba reported that a motion was brought forward for the District to prepare a plan to introduce a French Immersion program at Cambridge Street Community Public School in September 2022. This school's

population consists of immigrants, families working in low-income employment, and racialized students. The current English stream school has very few students and the enrollment has been declining. The perception is that many neighbourhood students are choosing to attend schools that have French Immersion programs. This motion was not adopted for a variety of reasons including the Ministry of Education's moratorium on accommodation reviews of individual schools and the potential adverse impact on the English stream program. A Pupil Accommodation Review (PAR) occurs when staff is considering the closure of a school, especially if it is under-utilized. In addition, there are several English-only schools in the District that may need to be reviewed as well.

From an equity lens, there is an issue of which communities have direct access to French Immersion programs and whether the English stream is provided with sufficient support to ensure that those programs thrive in a similar way to French Immersion programs.

Ms. Hayles expressed interest in a further discussion about the equitable distribution of the French Immersion programs offered throughout the District.

7.4 Committee of the Whole, Budget

Ms. Funciello reported that in the Committee of the Whole, Budget meeting of 26 May 2021, committee members received updates on the financial forecast, the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) and budget process timelines.

She highlighted that funding for the HREA position is included into the 2021-2022 budget. Funding for the existing Black and Indigenous graduation coaching positions will continue. The decision to discontinue the disbursement to the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) Student Resource Officer (SRO) program was outlined. The funds are allocated to provide dedicated (SROs) to the two Urban Priority secondary schools and their feeder schools. The \$95,000 of funding directed to the SRO program was a District expenditure.

Ms. Funciello noted that there will be opportunities in June 2021 for the community to come forward to delegate at the Committee of the Whole meetings which discuss the 2021-2022 budget.

Co-chair Karshe indicated that she welcomed emails from the committee members expressing their interest to meet on an adhoc basis to discuss equity allocations within the staff-recommended budget.

8. New Business and Event Announcements

Student Trustee Liu announced that she is the policy coordinator for the Ontario Student Trustees Association (OSTA-AECO). One of the major projects that they have been working on was called The Volume of Our Voices. The second volume focused on the voice of minoritized students. Students contributed to the report through writing stories about their own experiences about going to school and how they have perceived that their identities shape their school experiences. There are recommendations contained within the report directed to the Ministry of Education and to school boards in Ontario. She contributed in the report that the District has already begun some of the work proposed in the recommendations with the Roadmap.

Mr. McHugh shared the success of the Inuuqatigiit Educational Hubs. The program was developed to support Inuit children and youth from grades 1 to 12 within the educational system by providing academic and cultural support in smaller cohorts of 6 to 8 children. The program has impacted the students in a positive way and the provincial government has expressed interest in creating more programs based upon the hub model. Co-Chair Grover asked Mr. McHugh to consider leading a presentation on the success of the hubs in ACE's community discussion agenda area in the fall.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:16 p.m.