

## SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE PUBLIC REPORT

**Tuesday, December 14, 2021, 7:00 p.m.  
Zoom Meeting**

Trustees Present:	Justine Bell, Donna Blackburn, Christine Boothby, Rob Campbell, Lyra Evans, Mark Fisher, Wendy Hough, Jennifer Jennekens, Keith Penny, Sandra Schwartz, Lynn Scott, AmaturRaheem Salam-Alada (Student Trustee), Charles Chen (Student Trustee)
Staff Present:	Camille Williams-Taylor (Director of Education), Brett Reynolds (Associate Director), Mike Carson (Chief Financial Officer), Janice McCoy (Superintendent of Human Resources), Michele Giroux (Executive Officer, Corporate Services), Prince Duah (Superintendent of Instruction), Mary Jane Farrish (Superintendent of Instruction), Nancy Brady (Superintendent of Instruction), Shawn Lehman (Superintendent of Instruction), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Reg Lavergne, Carolyn Tanner (Human Rights and Equity Advisor), Joan Oracheski (Manager of Research, Evaluation & Analytics Division), Karyn Carty Ostafichuk (Manager of Planning), Vatansho Vatanshiev (Research Officer of Research Evaluation & Analytics Division), Sandra Owens (Manager of Business & Learning Technologies), Diane Pernari-Hergert (Manager of Communications & Information Services), Richard Sinclair (Manager of Legal Services and Labour Relations), Emily Balla (Mental Health Lead), Nicole Guthrie (Manager of Board Services), Darren Gatley (Board/Committee Coordinator), Michael Guilbault (AV Technician)
Non-Voting Representatives Present:	Christine Moulaison (OCASC), Christine Lanos (OCEOC), Stephanie Kirkey (OSSTF-District 25), Susan Gardner (ETFO), Pat Dixon (OCEOTA-ALT), Melodie Gondek (OSSTF- ESP), Lili Miller (IEAC)

1. Call to Order - Vice-Chair of the Board

Vice-Chair Penny called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. He acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Territory and thanked the Algonquin Nations for hosting the meeting on their land.

2. Approval of Agenda

**Moved by Trustee Boothby,**

**THAT the agenda be approved.**

**Carried**

3. Matters for Discussion:

3.1 Report 21-091, Sense of Belonging at School (M. Giroux)

Your committee had before it Report 21-091. Using data from Valuing Voices - Identity Matters! Student Survey conducted in 2019-2020, this report examined the following questions:

- a) How do OCDSB students rate their sense of belonging at school?
- b) How does a sense of belonging at school vary across demographic characteristics and identities?
- c) What do students identify as being important for contributing to their sense of belonging at school?

Executive Officer Giroux advised that the report examined a student or students' feeling of connection to school and if a sense of belonging varied through different demographics, characteristics, and identities. She noted that this work aligns with the culture of caring goal in the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan by advancing equity and sense of belonging at school and following the Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Roadmap (Roadmap). She added that the data is used to identify connections and examine any disproportionalities in the school system.

Staff noted the following highlights from the report:

- Sense of belonging declines in adolescents;
- 31,985 respondents, representing 42% of the student population, participated in the survey;
- Top factors that contributed to students' sense of belonging included support at home and school, social interactions and interpersonal experiences, learning experiences through instructional practices, and relationships with peers and staff;
- School staff help provide an inclusive environment to students;
- Staff used specific quotes from families and students in the report to reflect marginalized voices;
- The Third Path Framework established a connection between well-being and student achievement through the development of authentic relationships with students and educators;
- The equity team works closely with educators to ensure that student identity is centred to improve a sense of belonging;

- Students should feel that they belong to the school community and it is important for students to see themselves reflected through staffing representation;
- It is important to create networking opportunities for students to connect on a personal level and to build relationships with peers. This can be achieved by incorporating group activities and assignments in the classroom and through extracurricular activities; and
- Staff are working to address barriers in schools that impede a sense of belonging through work such as the Roadmap, developing and implementing an equitable recruitment strategy, and through staff training.

During the discussion and in response to questions, the following information was provided:

- Although only 42% of students responded to the survey, staff did not feel that any group of students were underrepresented and were confident that the voices from the student population were captured. Staff also examined external sources of data to compare their findings;
- Staff noted that full participation in surveys is a challenge and are working to reflect input through actionable changes in the hope this will increase response rates in future surveys;
- Survey responses for grades 7 to 12 were gathered during a time of labour disruption which may have negatively impacted participation rates;
- Staff discourage honourariums for survey completion as it could be viewed as coercion;
- There is considerable overlap between sense of belonging and well-being;
- Although there are correlations between well-being and sense of belonging, staff noted that there is no evidence of causality between the two;
- The Third Path Framework works to establish a connection between well-being and student achievement through the development of authentic relationships between students and educators. This framework can target identified groups of students that require additional relationship building;
- Staff noted that Ministry funding for identity-based data collection have been regularized and part of the next step is to continue to invest in research or to focus on strategies to address concerns;

- Staff will determine a timeframe within the next 18 months for data collection which may incur additional funding requirements;
- Members suggested that cohorts be followed from elementary to secondary school to determine if implemented strategies have been effective;
- The requirement for parental input for junior kindergarten to grade 6 and student input from grades 7 to 12 was a staff decision;
- The Ministry-mandated data collection to be completed by school districts by January 2023, allows for parents to respond on students' behalf from junior kindergarten to grade 8. Districts that have already completed this work, including the OCDSB, will look to compare the data from other districts;
- A range of strategies for increasing educator-student relationships and representation include initiatives such as following the Roadmap, hiring of graduation coaches and support coordinators, work related to the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) initiative, and community relationship building;
- Director Williams-Taylor recognized the importance of recognizing student experiences in classrooms and the impact that educators have on students. She noted that it is important to build capacity for staff in order to improve connections and understanding with students. Staff work to create opportunities for educators to improve their skills and understanding through training;
- Some members expressed the view that staff focused too much on continual research and would like to see more actionable changes in terms of increasing staff diversity;
- Staff noted that recent employment demographic data was reviewed and used to compare that data with that of the local community. Staff noted that there have been significant changes in provincial hiring practices of educators, the Board approved an equitable hiring policy, and that human resources staff work with hiring managers and principals to further diversify employees, initiatives that are tied to the 2019-2023 Strategic Plan;
- Director Williams-Taylor recognized the responsibility to improve demographic data collection in order to measure staff diversity. She noted the importance in building staff confidence to identify themselves in the demographic survey. Supporting staff-affiliate groups where experiences and narratives can be shared, demonstrates that identities are valued in the OCDSB;
- Directors Williams-Taylor noted that the District does not have an active plan on data collection to determine the impact of poverty on

students. She noted that most equity work within the District includes discussion on socioeconomic disadvantage and that the upcoming Human Rights policy will address this issue. She noted that it is difficult to collect data on poverty and outcomes for students as dignity is a key piece when discussing poverty. She recognized that issues of poverty can influence identity and that the District has engaged in its work on socioeconomic reality by community or neighbourhood as opposed to individuals;

- Members noted that staff should have special consideration for socioeconomic conditions that some students face in order to increase a sense of belonging in schools;
- Some members expressed interest in comparing sense of belonging data with other school boards' data in Ontario, once it becomes available;
- Some members pointed out that visual representation of minoritized groups is not always apparent and that it is important to not make assumptions of an individual's identity based on visual appearance;
- Staff noted that the discussion and work to increase students' sense of belonging extends into the community through the Strategic Plan. The District works with several layers of community building such as communities within the Board, the City of Ottawa, and provincially. The District also works with local community partners, community and non-profit groups in formal and informal partnerships to further build relationships. Through a community initiative, the OCDSB was recognized for its work as a member of the COVID-19 Community Response Table with the Community Builder Award. The FACE initiative expands formal community partners including grass-roots organizations; and
- Staff noted that the strategy plan cycle examines the work being conducted to implement changes identified in surveys and relationship building in the community. The next step is to continue analyzing the outcomes of changes.

#### 4. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

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Keith Penny, Chair