

Compass Direction: Engagement and Connectedness

Goal: Build and strengthen collaborative relationships with Indigenous, Black, and minoritized students, parents, and staff to create a welcoming and inclusive school environment.

Actionable Item 1: Family and Community Engagement

Specific Practices:

- Develop and share an annual written Family Engagement Plan detailing specific events, communication strategies, and outreach efforts designed to connect with diverse families, particularly Indigenous, Black, and minoritized communities;
- Schedule meetings, workshops, and school events at varied times (day/evening) and offer multiple formats (in-person, virtual, hybrid) to accommodate diverse family schedules and needs;
- Ensure key school communications (e.g., newsletters, website updates, automated messages) are available in the primary languages spoken by the school community and utilize culturally relevant/respectful language and visuals;
- Organize school events that specifically celebrate and honour the diverse cultural backgrounds present within the student and family population;
- Establish and promote multiple accessible channels for families to provide feedback and input into school planning and decision-making (e.g., suggestion boxes, dedicated email, targeted focus groups, accessible School Council meetings);
- Implement a system for regularly communicating back to the school community how family input has been considered and utilized;
- Monitor participation data for school events/meetings, disaggregating where appropriate, to identify and address potential barriers to engagement for specific family groups; and
- Utilize family feedback from surveys (e.g., school climate survey) and other channels to annually evaluate and refine the school's Family Engagement Plan and practices.

Actionable Item 2: Student-Teacher Relationships and Belonging

Specific Practices:

- Implement school-wide expectations and provide reminders/resources for staff on relationship-building practices, such as greeting students individually, using preferred names/pronouns correctly, and demonstrating active listening;
- Provide professional learning opportunities for staff on trauma-informed care and strategies for building trust and rapport with students from diverse backgrounds, including those who have faced marginalization;

- Ensure classroom environments (displays, libraries, resources) visibly reflect and affirm the diverse racial, cultural, linguistic, gender, sexual orientation, and ability identities of students;
- Integrate pedagogical approaches (e.g., circle discussions, collaborative projects) that allow students to share their experiences and perspectives safely and respectfully;
- Establish and utilize regular, low-stakes methods (e.g., anonymous quick surveys, reflection prompts, student voice committees) to gather student feedback on their sense of belonging and relationships within the classroom and school;
- Analyze student feedback, including school climate survey results specifically focusing on relationship and belonging metrics (disaggregated by identity groups), to inform school improvement planning and professional development;
- Deliver targeted training for all staff on fostering inclusive relationships with students with disabilities, covering effective communication, understanding diverse needs, using person-first language, and creating accessible learning spaces; and
- Conduct annual mandatory training/review for all staff on OCDSB procedure PR.586.SCO (Religious Accommodation for Students), focusing on respectful processes, appropriate communication protocols with families, and avoiding assumptions.

Actionable Item 3: Community Partnerships for Well-being

Specific Practices:

- Develop and maintain an updated, accessible directory of local community organizations providing culturally relevant services (mental health, mentorship, settlement, family support, cultural programs), with a focus on those serving Indigenous, Black, and minoritized communities;
- Designate a specific staff member (e.g., administrator, guidance counsellor, community liaison) as the primary contact for building and maintaining relationships with key community partners;
- Actively collaborate with identified community organizations to co-design and co-deliver workshops, programs, or events within the school setting that address specific student and family needs (e.g., culturally specific counselling support groups, parenting workshops, mentorship opportunities);
- Establish clear, confidential processes for referring students and families to external community supports when needs are identified beyond the school's scope;
- Develop formal partnership agreements or MOUs (Memorandums of Understanding) with frequently utilized community partners, outlining roles, responsibilities, communication methods, and protocols for information sharing (adhering to privacy legislation); and
- Implement a structured process for regular collaboration (e.g., scheduled meetings) involving school staff (Admin, Student Success, Guidance, Social work, LSTs) and relevant Central Departments (Social Work, Attendance, Indigenous Ed, Equity) to:
 - Review disaggregated student attendance data;

- Identify students/groups facing significant attendance barriers (particularly Indigenous, racialized students, and students with disabilities); and
 - Coordinate targeted, culturally responsive interventions and supports involving school resources and community partners.
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Actionable Item 4: Centering Indigenous Student Voice & Community Engagement

Center Indigenous student voices in planning and leadership, while building and maintaining respectful relationships with local and urban Indigenous communities.

Specific Practices:

- **Student Voice & Leadership:** Establish Indigenous student groups and advisory councils to ensure Indigenous student voices are central to school and board-level planning and leadership.
- **Community Consultation:** Regularly consult with Indigenous families, community partners, and organizations to strengthen relationships and ensure educational practices are culturally relevant and responsive.
- **Dedicated Support Staff:**
 - Support and expand the role of Graduation Coaches in key schools to provide targeted academic and social-emotional support for Indigenous students.
 - Identify and integrate Indigenous Social Workers to offer culturally sensitive support and connect students and families with essential community resources.
 - Ensure Indigenous Student Support Coordinators receive ongoing support and guidance from superintendency to effectively advocate for and support Indigenous students.
- **Self-Identification Promotion:** Actively promote respectful, voluntary self-identification among Indigenous students to ensure accurate data for program planning and resource allocation.