

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)
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Update on the Identity-based Data Collection Project

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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

- 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.

Reporting

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?

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