



ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EQUITY

September 26, 2019

6:00 pm

Trustees' Committee Room

133 Greenbank Road

Ottawa, Ontario

Members: Elaine Hayles (Community Representative), Raigelee Alorut (Tungasuvvingat Inuit), Awad Ibrahim (University of Ottawa), Lisa Montroy (Family Services Ottawa), Ryan Doucette (Young Leaders Advisory Council), Sonia Nadon-Campbell (Special Education Advisory Committee), Bob Dawson, Caretta Williams, and Levi Steward

Non-Voting Members and Guests: Rob Campbell (Trustee), Chris Ellis (Trustee), Michele Giroux (Executive Officer), Dorothy Baker (Superintendent of Curriculum Services), Jacqueline Lawrence (Equity and Diversity Coordinator), Peter Symmonds (Superintendent of Learning Support Services), Dr. Petra Duschner (Manager Mental Health and Critical Services), David Sutton (OCDSB Educator), (Sue Rice (Equity Instructional Coach), Leigh Fenton (Board/Committee Coordinator)

1. Welcome/Land Acknowledgement

Elaine Hayles called the meeting to order at 6:25 p.m. and acknowledged the meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Territory. She thanked the Algonquin Nation for hosting the meeting on their land.

2. Approval of the Agenda

Quorum could not be achieved. It was considered important to proceed with an information session.

3. Community Voice (delegations)

There were no delegations.

4. Review of Advisory Committee on Equity Report

4.1 Minutes of 23 May 2019

The approval of the minutes was deferred to the 24 October 2019 meeting.

4.2 Business Arising from the Minutes

Business arising from the minutes of 23 May 2019 was not discussed.

4.3 Review of Long Range Agenda

Coordinator Lawrence defined the long range agenda as a compilation of items for discussion based on previous meeting minutes and upcoming District initiatives. During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- Trustee Ellis requested the addition of Annual Student Achievement Report (ASAR), detailing achievement data from the District to measure progress in student learning;
- A request to staff was made to embed document links within their reports, where possible; and
- Acting Chair Hayles provided that three of the six meetings this year will be located in an alternate central location.

4.4 Motion/Action Tracking Report

The motion/action tracking report was provided for information. Trustee Campbell suggested that the report be edited to remove duplication of actions and ascertain the status of items that are several years old.

5. Director's Welcome

Director Williams-Taylor launched the 2019-2020 school year with a video newsreel highlighting the District's prevailing accomplishments and aspirations for the coming year. The video file will be circulated to the committee.

6. Action/Discussion/Information Items

6.1 Strategic Plan 2019-2023

Your committee had before it the approved Strategic Plan 2019-2023. During the discussion and in response to questions, the following points were noted:

- Executive Office Giroux explained that the plan was finalized at the 24 June 2019 Board meeting and the work up until now included building awareness of the plan within the community and determining the inclusion of the plan within the existing infrastructure of the District;
- Superintendent Baker recommended considering the work of the Advisory Committee on Equity (ACE) alongside the goals of the Strategic Plan and to contemplate where there is opportunity for this committee to provide advice to the Board;

- Trustee Scott recognized that the Board agreed to change the culture of the District by heightening the meaning of innovation, caring and social responsibility. She speculated that there will be numerous areas where the members of ACE will contribute towards the four year strategic direction.
- Acting Chair Halyes expressed a concern over the general difficulty that parents have in navigating the school system and emphasised the importance of communicating with the community, engaging both parents and students alike. She queried best ways to assist in the success of the strategic plan, to help the students succeed. Executive Office Giroux encouraged the committee to evaluate the benefit of discussion on a future agenda about the specific goals of the strategic plan. For example, under the objective of Culture of Social Responsibility, one goal is to “remove barriers to equity of access, opportunity and outcomes.” The committee may choose to focus on this. Future policies on equity will come to ACE for consultation through Superintendent Baker. The ACE member appointed to sit on the Committee of the Whole will share the committee’s insights with the Board;
- Under the objective of Culture of Caring, a desired system outcome is to hire and retain a “more representative workforce.”; and
- Acting Chair Halyes mentioned it would be useful to be able to discuss the strategic plan with outside parties who may be well informed on some of these challenges that the strategic plan hopes to rectify. Executive Officer Giroux pointed out that the discussions which occur at advisory body committees informs the organization. The expectation is not for the committees to perform independent research on behalf of the District. She volunteered that one of the ways that may help committees receive reports, is for staff to generate a list of guidance questions to aid in the discussion. Acting Chair Halyes concluded that the committee will decide on strategic initiatives to explore and these items will be placed on the long range agenda.

6.2 Draft Mental Health Strategy (P. Symmonds, ext 8287)

a. Memo 19-109, Draft Mental Health Strategy

Your committee had before it Memo 19-109 providing an update on the status of the development of the OCDSB Mental Health Strategy.

Acting Chair Halyes requested more information on the equitable representation of staff who are building the mental health strategy. Dr. Duschner affirmed that the work is collaborative and includes Learning Support Services, Program & Learning, Diversity & Equity and Indigenous Education staff and representatives from community partnerships across the city. The draft recognizes the impact of a variety of factors pertaining to mental health with focused work on promoting mental health, prevention of mental health challenges and when intervention is necessary, facilitating access to culturally responsive care.

Mr. Sutton requested that the names of the community partners are shared with the committee to ensure there are no gaps. Dr. Duschner responded that the school staff utilizes a document called Pathways to Care, outlining the steps to accessing community contacts and on an annual basis there are community partners seeking involvement and contributing to the work of the District. She noted a current community partners listing can be shared as a follow-up action.

Dr. Duschner accentuated the collaborative work of the District. LSS staff work together with colleagues from other departments to build staff capacity in cultural competency, culturally responsive practices and in building and sustaining mentally healthy classrooms.

Ms. Nadon-Campbell voiced that when considering Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) students, who will struggle with assessing their own mental health, could this strategy lay the groundwork where friends use checkpoints to help identify potential concerns. Dr. Duschner acknowledged that students will have an opportunity to learn about mental health and well-being through the Health and Physical Education curriculum. Beyond this exists specialized training where public health nurses can cultivate ways to cope with stress and explain the signs and symptoms of anxiety in a developmentally appropriate way.

Dr. Duschner highlighted that a multi-disciplinary team comprised of psychologists and social workers are present at each school. When the team meets, students of concern are discussed to develop a plan and a pathway to care. These teams provide a range of services, beginning with consultations with staff supporting the students and extending to short-term intervention work using standardized, evidence-based intervention approaches. If there is a determination that the child would be best served by the community, a referral is made. During times where students require hospitalization, the District maintains contact with the students undergoing treatment outside the school context to encourage the connection to the school. Upon return-to-school, a partnership between professional services staff and the clinicians in the community is forged to ensure the continuity of care. Educators are in a unique position to help students as they know about child development and can help identify signs of difficulty. The Supporting Minds document was developed by School Mental Health Ontario and outlines ways signs and symptoms associated with various mental health challenges and provides strategies to support different kinds of mental health challenges within a classroom setting.

Superintendent Symmonds noted that the draft strategy is in its last iteration, having been presented at all sub-committees of the Board. He explained that for further input, time is of the essence as the document will be tabled at the Board in October and later in the fall, the action plans are slated for development.

b. Memo 19-103, Support for Mental Health Through An Equity Lens

Your committee had before it Memo 19-103, providing information on the development of the OCDSB Mental Health Strategy in alignment with the OCDSB strategic plan 2019-2023.

Dr. Duschner highlighted that the notion of ‘capacity building’ along with ‘equity and specific populations’ are incorporated within the strategic plan in the Culture of Caring objective. Increasing staff knowledge in cultural competency, coupled with equitable and inclusive practices within the classroom helps to promote mental health and well-being. ‘System coordination and Pathways’ focuses on the work performed in the District and how that work extends into the community.

Superintendent Symmonds noted that the Ministry of Education does provide some funding for mental health workers and funding for Well-being, Safe, Accepting and Healthy schools. Specific mental health services are also provided through community partnerships. He illustrated that much time is required to evaluate the broad subject of systemic barriers. The District’s multi-faceted approach includes a literature review, community collaboration, focus groups and staff surveys. Acting Chair Halyes requested updates on progress before completion.

Ms. Williams commented that in her experience parents are reluctant to sign the forms that allow for further intervention, as they may fear losing their child to the system. A multitude of trust issues present themselves when attempting to conquer the stigmas associated with mental health. She noted that it was important to raise awareness in the community and enlist people in the community to help build a greater understanding. A barrier is lack of diversity within the professional staff; increased diversity contributes to increased trust. Dr. Duschner agreed that the District does not have the diversity that would be reflective of student population. She noted that in the new strategic plan, emphasis is being placed on building a representative workforce.

Mr. Ibrahim inquired about the potential of reaching other communities such as 613-819 Black Hub advocacy group. Dr. Duschner thanked Mr. Ibrahim for this referral, and noted that 50 organizations are represented at the Ottawa Child Mental Health networking table, including the District.

6.3 Report 19-081, Update on the Identity-based Data Collection Project (M. Giroux, ext 8310)

Your committee had before it Report 19-081, providing an update on the Identity-based Data Collection Project.

Executive Officer Giroux reported that in the 2018-2019 school year, the focus was on building an infrastructure for the data collection and engaging with the community to discuss the outcomes of an identity based data collection project. Due to the work with the focus groups, across the organization, staff was guided towards a better understanding of identity and through listening to the communities, are learning how to nurture identity. Follow-up meetings with community partners to review feedback on the

project and to discuss the process for the collection of identity based-data will occur by the end of October 2019. Next steps involve building awareness on the purpose of this work, communicating timelines, and the mechanics of survey completion.

Executive Officer Giroux stated that data on achievement, suspensions and absences is currently collected by the District. The survey features demographic and perceptual questions. Demographic information is needed to reveal which groups are subject to similar experiences; the perceptual questions address sense of belonging and sense of safety. The District does collect school climate data but this data is anonymous and therefore cannot be correlated back to identity data. She stipulated that the provincial data standards are very specific about the collection of demographic data and the District is committed to following these standards. The regulations under the Anti-Racism Act, establish a framework for the order and nature of questions relating to personal information.

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

- Executive Officer Giroux agreed to share the sample questions provided by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and extended an invitation to the committee to attend the community partnership group;
- Mr. Ibrahim suggested a targeted ad campaign with CBC morning that will explain the identity-based data collection program to the general public in order to popularize the survey. Executive Officer Giroux explained that she and Coordinator Lawrence met with the Ottawa Citizen to present the project for the purposes of a future story timed with the release of the survey. She encouraged the members who are connected to their community to share the knowledge about the survey and the importance of participation;
- Ms. Alorut suggested that the consent form for parents, include the questions. Executive Officer Giroux confirmed that the types of questions will be shared; however parents will not be privy to the responses of students in grades 7-12 to protect confidentiality;
- Key level findings will be presented to the community in the spring of 2020;
- To incorporate the data into a detailed level of analysis, data correlation is necessary. Student achievement information is published in the fall;
- The purpose of the data collection is to determine whether certain groups of students are over-represented in categories and to analyze systemic racial inequalities;
- Superintendent Baker reiterated that the context of the project of identity-based data collection is about acknowledging that racism and bias exist. She insisted that the ongoing collection of identity based data becomes a tool to better understand and eliminate systemic barriers;
- Ms. Rice suggested, for Special Education students who require a scribe, that a letter of confidentiality is prepared for the scribe for signature in order to assure the student the disclosed information is classified;

- Mr. Doucette suggested a Terms of Reference for ACE to set out the working arrangements for the committee and to better equip the committee with guidance on how they bring items for consultation to the community; and
- Mr. Doucette suggested that District staff are surveyed to determine their identities to better illustrate the representation of diversity within the workforce. Superintendent Baker supported the concept of collecting identity-based data from staff to determine the contributions that are missing at an administrative level. She announced her team is engaged in a readiness plan for the data delivery and they are prepared and excited for the dialogue stemming from data analysis.

6.4 Ace Membership Campaign Update

Coordinator Lawrence disclosed that 40 membership applications were received. She is coordinating a skills matrix for applicants. Membership will be the primary focus of the 24 October 2019 meeting.

7. Department Update

Superintendent Baker specified that for 2019-2020 her portfolio consists of Equity, Indigenous Education and English as a Second Language (ESL). Acting Chair Halyes requested an organization chart.

The following announcements were made:

- October is Islamic Heritage Month. Resources have been created for the school communities developed in conjunction with the National Council of Canadian Muslims. On 1 October, 2019 a screening of “14 Muslim and Me” is scheduled at the Ottawa Art Gallery, hosted by Adriean Harwood, featuring a panel for a question and answer period;
- 24 October 2019: Indigenous Youth Symposium at Confederation Education Centre;
- 30 September 2019: Orange Shirt Day was designed to educate people and promote awareness about the Indian Residential School System and the impact this system has had on Indigenous communities;
- 9 November 2019: Parent Conference at Longfield Davidson Heights Secondary School;
- 14 November 2019: Rainbow Youth Forum at Confederation Education Centre; and
- 26 March 2019: Black Student Forum

8. Committee Reports

8.1 Committee of the Whole

There were no reports from Committee of the Whole.

9. New Business

There were no items raised in new business.

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:47 p.m.

Elaine Hayles, Acting Chair, Advisory Committee on Equity