

ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EQUITY REPORT

**June 4, 2020
6:00 pm
Zoom
Meeting**

- Voting Members:** Elaine Hayles, Harvey Brown, Nasrin Mirbagheri-Javanfar, Nyk Morigan, Bronwyn Funiciello, Nicki Dunlop, Carrie-Lynn Barkley, Chandonette Johnson-Arowolo, Meghan Wills, Deepika Grover, Elizabeth Sweeney, Jasmine Qi, Ayan Yusuf Karshe,
- Non-Voting Members:** Chris Ellis (Trustee), Joy Liu (Student Senator), Sonia Nadon-Campell (Special Education Advisory Committee), Susan Cowin (Special Education Advisory Committee), Ruth Sword (Spiritual Care in Secondary Schools), Alexander John MacIver, Alla Shanneb, Bob Dawson, June Girvan, Said Mohamed
- Staff and Guests:** Justine Bell (Trustee), Lynn Scott (Trustee), Dorothy Baker (Superintendent of Instruction), Michele Giroux (Executive Officer), Carolyn Tanner (Human Rights and Equity Advisor), Jacqueline Lawrence (Equity and Diversity Coordinator), Sue Rice (OCDSB), Jeanine Bradley (OCDSB), Nicole Guthrie (Manager, Board Services), Leigh Fenton (Board Coordinator)

1. Welcome

1.1 Land Acknowledgement

Chair Hayles called the meeting to order at 6:09 p.m. She acknowledged that the meeting is taking place on unceded Algonquin Territory and thanked the Algonquin Nations for hosting the meeting on their land.

1.2 A Moment of Silence for George Floyd

Chair Hayles requested a moment of silence for those harmed or killed due to their race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status or disability.

Director Williams-Taylor thanked the committee for accommodating her appearance on the agenda. She wished to address the Advisory Committee on Equity (ACE), a group that works on matters of equity, given the egregious challenges against the black community, in particular over the last ten days. She noted the death of George Floyd is a stark reminder that anti-black racism is ever

present and while this incident and many others like it have taken hold of the media outlets in the United States of America, it is important to recognize that racism is not unknown to those in Canada or locally in Ottawa.

Director Williams-Taylor advised that the District is taking steps to communicate to the community the seriousness of racist events and the impact on the staff and the students that are served. Efforts are in place to ensure that people remain connected and understand that they are supported. The message to the community also highlights the ongoing commitment to the equity work underscored by the discussions and activities of the ACE, the District and the Board of Trustees. The District aims to ensure changes will be felt in classrooms, in places of work, and in the community of the OCDSB.

Ms. Mirbagheri-Javanfar enquired over the specifics of the plan to support Black students through the anguish of racial violence and the simultaneous stress of the COVID-19 virus pandemic. Director Williams-Taylor responded that in conversations with the Ottawa Black Educators Network, a plan was developed to meet with the organizers of the Black Student Forum, which will be held over a digital format on 18 June 2020. At this meeting she will be soliciting their input on support for Black students at the forum and beyond that. Additionally, there will be a written communication to students.

Ms. Grover requested the Director provide a sense of the commitment to equity issues to prepare the committee for their conversations in the coming months. Director Williams-Taylor responded that a draft version of the Human Rights and Equity Roadmap is being created for further consultation by the District's advisory committees, and the community. The current strategic plan outlines the direction up until 2023 and senior management is examining the progress pertaining to equity, human rights and indigenous education. Over the next three years, action items will be explicit, the impact will be measured and affect students directly.

Nyk Morrigan (Them/They) queried the supports in place for the transgender and gender non-conforming students and staff who are scared with the recent loss of life involving anti-transgender bias. Director Williams-Taylor shared that the District is expanding support for affinity groups and a network is being forged for those who identify in the 2SLGBTQ community. Superintendent Baker contributed that, over the years, the support system has been strengthened: however, there is a lot of work to be done. A future ACE meeting will be dedicated to exploring the topic. She noted the work of Sue Rice, Instructional Coach – Inclusive Education, in these areas, such as the Gender Identity and Expression Guide, the Rainbow Youth Forum, and the Spring Fling. The District is working with the Psychology, Mental Health and Critical Services departments to provide further support to the Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA).

2. Approval of the Agenda

Moved by Sue Cowin,

THAT the agenda be approved.

Carried

3. Department Update

3.1 Superintendent's Report

a. Learn at Home Parent Resources

Superintendent Baker highlighted that the Learn at Home Program has served to amplify inequalities amongst learners. At this time the District is shifting policies and procedures that will make a difference. The work of ACE has been foundational in informing strategic actions to be taken going forward.

The Learn at Home Parent Resources were included in the meeting package for information, in English, French and Arabic, for every grade level.

b. Questions from ACE Members

In advance of the meeting, ACE sent questions to the District representing various concerns. Listed below are the questions (Q) from the committee and answers (A) from Superintendent Baker:

Q: How is OCDSB ensuring all students have access to the devices they need to fully participate in distance learning? How is OCDSB ensuring all students have access to reliable, high-speed internet to continue their education?

A: At the outset of the school closure on 13 March 2020, the school principals, vice principals and educators connected with every family to determine their technology needs. Three phases of technology were deployed by courier service in consultation with Ottawa Public Health (OPH). To help students learn at home, Business & Learning Technologies (B<) delivered more than 11,000 Chromebooks and over 1178 Internet Hotspots to students in need. A process is in place to ensure that the technology is adequate and the student is fitted with the applications required. Some staff required access to devices and wireless fidelity as well.

Q: How is OCDSB supporting schools in structuring instructional time to meet the needs of students with varying levels of access to the internet and technology?

A: The District continues to process families through the Family Reception Center to ensure that those students have access to the internet and technology. For all families, the ability to access the time and space to learn at home is different. Teachers are being encouraged to offer flexible

learning periods. Educators are connecting personally with each student to understand their lived reality and learning goals. The dynamics of the Learn at Home Program has raised any relationship gaps between the teacher and student to be bridged.

Q: How is the OCDSB supporting students with disabilities who need specialized instruction, related services, and other supports during school closures?

A. From the outset of the emergency closure, Learning Support Services (LSS) staff started reaching out to teachers in specialized program classes and Learning Support Teachers to coordinate support for students and staff. LSS has developed an extensive assortment of professional learning opportunities for all educators (teachers, education assistants, early childhood educators) on how to provide support in an on-line environment. Virtual work spaces for teachers were created, online workshops and webinars are available, and collaboration is occurring across same grade teams.

School-based mental health staff have been providing remote support to students, including virtual tele-health practices.

At Crystal Bay Centre for Special Education and Clifford Bowey Public School, educators are engaging with students on a daily basis, along with connecting parents to external resources.

Q: How is OCDSB ensuring the instructional needs of English language learners are supported during school closures?

English Language Learners (ELL) are being supported in the following ways:

- Coaching sessions and workshops for educators;
- ELL Google site updated to reflect strategies to support during learning at home;
- Ongoing home-school communication with support of Multicultural Liaison Officers (MLOs);
- The use of school-specific strategies, for example YouTube videos simplifying Board messaging;
- Weekly check-ins with ELL teachers; and
- Department collaboration on how to use the technologies provided.

Superintendent Baker noted that she is a part of the Ottawa Local Immigration Partnership (OLIP) Health and Well-being Table. Currently the discussions are focussed on support mechanisms for refugees, immigrants, new comers, and racialized people in the community during

the COVID-19 era. Overcoming communication challenges require the help of many community partners.

Q: What kind of support and professional development are you providing to teachers, teacher's assistance etc, in supporting the needs of boys, students in special education, English language learners, First Nation, Inuit, Métis, African/Caribbean/Black - groups that have been explicitly identified by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat as under-performing?

A: There is a collaborative effort at the District to provide ongoing online professional development for the educators. Departmental sessions are available for Program and Learning, Indigenous Education, Equity, English as a Second Language, English Literacy Development, Business & Learning Technologies, Learning Support Services, and Innovation and Adolescent Learning. Some of the classes in Equity include: "Let's Talk Equity", "Let's Talk Gender", "Let's Talk Race", "and Let's Talk Accessibility". In response to the feedback on the needs of teachers, early childhood educators and office administrators more subjects are being added to the list. The Indigenous Education Teams are engaged in 'virtual lunch and learn' and 'tea and talks' sessions, exploring topics such as "What is an Ally" and "How to Integrate Social Justice and the Indigenous Perspectives into the Classroom Curriculum".

Q: How is OCDSB supporting the social and emotional well-being of students, their parents/caregivers, and teachers during school closures? How are you maintaining regular communication with students and families — particularly the most vulnerable — during school closures?

A: All OCDSB owned channels have been used in communications response efforts as appropriate. This includes emails to all parents, students and staff; social media outreach via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram; and the OCDSB website has served as a central information hub. The MLOs have helped with the outreach work to families and reporting to the District on the well-being of families.

Beyond this, the OCDSB has maintained regular contact with local media outlets and also purchased advertisements in multiple languages to reach diverse communities through CHIN radio.

The Education Foundation of Ottawa is supporting vulnerable students in the District. Clarissa Arthur, Executive Director of the Education Foundation of Ottawa, has reached out to the communities to purchase and arrange for delivery school supplies for seven hundred students doing

schoolwork at home. Through a program called 'Bridges over Barriers', \$26,000 dollars has been directed towards students who fall under the crisis umbrella. This fund is established based on the values of equity and the need for early intervention, with a commitment to maintaining the dignity of every individual who is a benefactor of this fund.

Q: How is OCDSB measuring student progress to ensure students and families have an accurate picture of student performance for this school year?

A: Due to the Ministry-mandated school closure, student learning will be assessed on their work from the beginning of term 2, ending 13 March 2020. If there is evidence collected from the teacher that demonstrates improvement from 23 March until 19 June, it will be reflected in a final grade. The report card grade will not be lower than the mark the students had on 13 March 2020. The work assigned in the Learn at Home Program addresses all the key concepts so the students will be ready for the following year. New and differentiated ways of learning for each student have been introduced during the extended closure. Educators are recognizing the strengths that every student brings with them based on their life experiences.

Q: How are you supporting all high school students, especially seniors, in staying on track to graduate and preparing for post secondary and/or career?

A: To support grade 12 students in successfully graduating in June 2020, Innovation and Adolescent Learning (IAL) is offering funding to schools to hire an occasional teacher (OT) to work in concert with their student success teacher (SST) to enhance supports for students who are currently at risk of not graduating due to low credit accumulation.

Funding has been offered to hire occasional teachers to work with the student success teachers. Students are encouraged to connect their learning to the requirements of credit.

Kyl Morrison was hired with Ministry funding as the Indigenous Graduation Coach. Tess Porter and Souad Musa were both hired to support Black students with their graduation and future aspirations. All three coaches will work throughout the summer.

c. Supplementary Information

a. Translation and Translated Supports for English Language Learners

The District's Translation and Translated Supports for English Language Learners was included in the agenda package for information.

b. Communications from the District During Co-VID 19

A document detailing the communications from the District during COVID-19 was included in the agenda package for information.

d. Identity Based Data Collection Infographic

Executive Officer Giroux reported on the timing and process of the Identity Based Data Collection project. The information was collected through a survey called "Valuing Voices: Identity Matters" launched in November 2019 and closed at the end of January 2020. Since that time, The Research, Evaluation & Analytics Division (READ) team have been analysing the data.

In the spring of 2019, focus groups with community partners were held to help identify systemic barriers and bias in the education system before the collection of identity based data. Care was taken to educate staff as to why identity matters, broaden the understanding of identity, and support students and colleagues with issues of identity. Proportional identity representation between students and staff was highlighted as an area to improve upon in hiring practices. Programming issues were brought forth from special education students, along with concerns about streaming practices in the District. Participants identified the need for further connectedness to uphold relationships and increase a sense of belonging. The six key areas requiring action were as follows:

- Acknowledge that racism and bias exist in the education system;
- Listen to what students, parents and community partners saying;
- Gain an understanding of the values and lived experiences that shape students' identity;
- Increase representation of diverse groups in staff to promote greater sense of belonging for students;
- Be sensitive in the data collection and reporting so as not to reinforce stereotypes; and
- Understanding how identity matters to allow students to engage in opportunities to address the experience of identity.

The survey was designed to gather information about the OCDSB student population. For students in Kindergarten through Grade 6, parents/guardians were invited to complete a survey on behalf of each child. Students in grades 7- 12 were invited to complete the survey in school during class time. The survey was distributed electronically using a direct email link through the Qualtrics research platform; hard copies were made available upon request and sent via Canada Post to those families

without an email contact on file. Participation in the survey was voluntary, which means that individuals were able to opt out of survey completion entirely or opt out of specific questions. The Valuing Voices survey was translated into many languages. Evenings were held at the family reception centre where MLOs assisted with the completion of the surveys. The District was pleased with the overall participation rate of 46.5%. Further work is being undertaken to identify the voices that have not been captured.

Since the data collection has occurred, other steps towards the analysis and reporting include, entering the data of the 300 paper surveys, checking for any inaccuracies or inconsistencies in the database, reviewing all data fields to ensure data is in a format that is ready for analysis, reviewing the legal requirements for reporting as per the Ontario Data Standards, and executing a plan for data analysis and the production of a summary level report. At the end June 2020, the Board of Trustees will be presented with the summary of the survey. Once the survey data has been released, meetings with community partners will be scheduled to review the data and highlight priority areas of study. The data will be used to better understand achievement gaps, suspension and expulsion rates, streaming practices, the engagement levels of students and whether certain groups of students feel more or less safe at school.

There will be no data suppression in the full report of the findings. A data set containing the numbers and percentages for each item on the survey will be made available on the District website.

Executive Officer Giroux noted the District has a strong commitment to improving equity of access and opportunity for all students. In 2011, the District completed a comprehensive student survey which was a “snapshot” in time. A series of thematic research reports were derived from collecting this data. The 2011 collection project better equipped the District to undertake the recent survey. The 2019-2020 Valuing Voices survey was different in that it asked for census data as well as perceptual data such as sense of belonging. The Valuing Voices survey is intended to be the beginning of a cyclical data collection period.

4. New Business

4.1 Learn at Home Program Issues and Concerns – Breakout Discussion

Superintendent Baker sought the input of the committee on issues from the community pertaining to the Learn at Home program.

The committee was divided into three discussion groups. Key considerations were summarized in the following points:

- Parents are unsure of the implications behind the phrase “Learn at Home”, lending itself to the idea that parents can perform the tasks of teachers;

- There is little support with assignments. The Learn at Home document provided by the District regarding number of hours of study is challenging to understand and represents an unrealistic time allotment to complete the work for the week;
- The work/life balance for the parents supporting their children's learning is overwhelming and stressful;
- Some parents enjoyed the mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning;
- Kindergarten children prefer active play and find online sessions difficult;
- There were inconsistent expectations from different teachers;
- The Learn at Home Program was challenging for those students with exceptionalities;
- The structure of the classroom was missed by students;
- Parents who do not speak French could not assist their child's French learning assignments;
- The education style is teacher-centred and elementary students do not know how to learn by themselves;
- Resources were a major issue. Some households were struggling to share a computer and connectivity;
- This was a precipitous change and teachers should be congratulated for all they did in such a short amount of time to plan for a pandemic of this nature;
- Increased mental health risks and decreased academic engagement were affected by increased isolation;
- Unsafe home situations for students who are not able to be out at home;
- Trans and gender diverse students who were socially transitioning at school are now stuck at home unable to be themselves;
- Many Rainbow Clubs were not able to meet virtually;
- Parents of primary aged students are suffering from fatigue;
- Children the are generally shy are uncomfortable with the virtual meeting environment;
- Many parents expressed confusion with the messaging regarding grade improvement and the difference in direction from one teacher to another;
- Many parents noted that there was not enough interaction with the teacher and would like more teacher led learning;
- Many newcomer families do not have the computer language literacy to access the Google classroom and the issues of poverty and multitasking parents need to be considered in future learn at home models;
- COVID-19 has had a significant impact on Ottawa's Black, racialized and vulnerable communities. Language is an issue;
- Special education students have also been negatively impacted by the Learn at Home model. Additional support from Learning Support Teachers and Learning Resource Teachers is required

Superintendent Baker thanked the committee for their feedback.

4.2 Orientation and Next Steps

The committee was in agreement that they would like to participate in an orientation session over the summer break, if possible. It is important to them to understand how their work fits into the work of the other advisory committees.

5. Adjournment

Chair Hayles confirmed that the questions left in the chat function of the on-line meeting will be answered by District staff and appended to the final report (Appendix A).

The meeting adjourned the meeting at 8:11 pm.

Elaine Hayles, Acting Chair, Advisory Committee on Equity