

Overview

Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is the largest school board in Canada with approximately 235,000 students in 584 schools. The highest priority of the Board is the safety, security and well-being of the students and staff in TDSB schools and workplaces. The Board supports this priority through policies and procedures, the development and nurturing of relationships with local community organizations and agencies, a commitment to ongoing learning in the areas of school and community safety as well as through the development and sharing of best practices. All of this work is framed by the Board's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, Human Rights, Equity, Anti- Racism and Anti-Oppression and the elimination of streaming.

In TDSB, the work of creating positive school climates and making schools and workplaces safe, welcoming and inclusive is a part of everyone's role regardless of position, title or affiliation. It is also important to note that schools are a reflection of the larger community within which they exist. As such, when communities are challenged by issues of violence, schools will also be challenged. Creating safer schools goes beyond the work of a single School Board. It is the collective responsibility of all levels of government, communities and all Greater Toronto Area school boards.

Many elements go into the creation of caring and safe schools and workplaces. The most critical component is working through relationships with all internal and external stakeholders to build positive school climates where students and staff feel valued, heard and cared for irrespective of identity or social standing.

The Caring and Safe Schools (CSS) team was created in 2000 to provide leadership and support to the system in building more caring, safer and inclusive schools. The mandate of the team is to provide learning to system leaders related to building more positive school climates, to interrupt patterns of streaming related to student discipline, to develop and deliver professional learning related to CSS issues, to develop and support the implementation of CSS policies and procedures, to support school based staff on matters related to school safety, to deliver programming to students who require alternate placements, to work closely with families and caregivers to interrupt recidivism, to promote accountability to internal and external communities through open and transparent reporting of data, to support school security infrastructure needs and to work closely with external partners in support of school and community safety.

The work of the Caring and Safe Schools team has, and will continue to be informed by academics, practicing professionals and community experts who understand that racism and discrimination must be addressed and that intersectional identities and lived experiences must always be taken into account as part of the work. This learning is

shared with school administrators on a daily basis through job embedded learning. More broadly, it is shared through professional learning opportunities offered by the CSS team throughout the school year. An example of this is the “Threat to School Safety and Emergency Preparedness Training” that was offered in August 2022.

Research Trends

Annual Report

Since 2002 TDSB staff have presented the [Annual Caring and Safe Schools Report](#) to the Board. The purpose of the report is to update on matters related to Caring and Safe Schools, including the promotion of positive school climate and student discipline data disaggregated by different demographic factors. The report also highlights key supports available to students through interventions such as restorative practice, connections with the Urban Indigenous Education Centre and the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, Social Workers, Child and Youth Counselors, Child and Youth Workers, Psychologists and Caring and Safe School and Alternative Programs. Action plans and associated timelines are updated annually to address barriers and to heighten accountability related to ongoing and sustained progress in this area.

Key Findings

- TDSB Caring and Safe School data has been impacted by pauses to in-person learning experienced during the Covid-19 Pandemic. When analyzing this data relative to common time periods (September 1- March 15) from 2016-17 to 2019-2020, the number of suspensions has decreased by 6.4%. This trend supports the goal set out in the Board’s Multi-Year Strategic Plan of reducing the number of suspensions and expulsions as a way of addressing the streaming of students.
- Students that came from lower socio-economic backgrounds (represented by parent education, parent presence at home, family income / parent occupation) were more likely to be suspended than students from higher socio-economic background (61.4% vs. 13.7% in 2018-19);
- The percentage of all suspensions/expulsions given to Black students in 2018-19 was down 3.2% compared to 2016-17, from 36.2% to 33.0%;
- In the school years prior to the pandemic, self-identified Black, Indigenous, Middle Eastern and Mixed students were disproportionately high in the suspensions/expulsions, while East Asian, South Asian, and Southeast Asian students were under-represented.

Based on the Ministry of Education [Policy and Program Memorandum 120: Reporting Violent Incidents to the Ministry of Education](#), the term violent incident is defined as the occurrence of any one of the following.:

1. possessing a weapon, including possessing a firearm
2. physical assault causing bodily harm requiring medical attention
3. sexual assault
4. robbery
5. using a weapon to cause or to threaten bodily harm to another person
6. extortion
7. hate and/or bias-motivated occurrences

Violent incidents that occur on school premises during school-run programs must be reported to the Ministry of Education, whether the violent incident was committed by a student of the school or whether it was committed by any other person.

- Using this definition, the number of violent incidents on TDSB school premises is increasing, even while the total number of suspensions is decreasing. For the 2022-23 school year, if the current trend continues, the Board will be reporting the highest number of violent incidents since the data has been collected in 2000.

TDSB Student and Parent Census

The last TDSB Student and Parent Census was conducted five years ago and 2022-23 is scheduled as a Student and Parent Census year. Caring and Safe Schools will continue to work with the TDSB Research Department to ensure that questions related to positive school climate, school safety and student well-being reflect and take into account current trends that have occurred both in communities and schools.

When last asked directly about safety (2017 Census), 90% of grade 9 to 12 students indicated that they felt safe in classrooms (all the time or often). Further, 80% of secondary students felt safe in other parts of the school; 73% - 74% of secondary students felt safe outside on school property and around the school; and, 85% of secondary students felt safe on their way home (Census 2016).

In addition, almost all parents of students in JK-Grade 6 Census in 2017 report that their child gets along with others (92%); enjoys school (90%); feels welcome in the school (92%); their child(ren)'s school applies rules fairly (92%); and that differences amongst people are respected (88%).

Relationships With Adults and Peers In Schools

Relationships are the positive connections between students, their peers and school adults. Nurturing strong relationships helps support a positive school climate and an inclusive and welcoming school environment.

The following are proportions reported across the last decade of collecting data on school relationships.

Relationships with Peers in Schools

From 2011-2021, 74%-86% of students reported getting along, being able to connect, and feeling supported by peers in their schools.

Relationships with Adults in Schools

From 2011- to 2021, 80% to 90% of students have reported feeling supported by their teachers, that their teachers care about them, and that teachers provide extra help when they ask.

Between the 2011 and 2017 Census periods, similar proportions of students; (61%-65% for Grades 7-8 and 54%-56% for Grades 9-12) said they knew an adult in their school that they would feel comfortable turning to for personal support, advice, or help.

We must work more closely with Federations and Unions to strengthen relationships between students and school adults, striving to ensure that all students have the support of a caring adult at school. This will lead to a greater sense of safety, well-being and belonging in their school community.

Research Conducted During the Covid-19 Pandemic

During the Covid-19 pandemic, students were not asked directly about their feelings of safety in school buildings, as they were not consistently in those spaces. Students were asked about their feelings related to their “in person” school learning experiences. The questions asked are very closely associated to feelings of ‘being safe’ at school.

Throughout the Pandemic, Research Services connected with nearly 55,000 students. Below are some of the highlights.

In recent years, although not asked directly about safety, student’s perceptions of being at school include:

84% of students:

- enjoy school (all the time/often/sometimes) (Grade 7 to 12, Spring 2022).
- agree they feel they belong at their school (Grade 6 to 12, Winter 2020-2021)
- agree they learn better in-person (Grade 6 to 12, Winter 2020-2021)

In total, almost 70% of students agreed that they enjoyed school (Grade 6 to 12, Winter 2020-2021)

In the Winter of 2021, 34,000 students were asked about their learning experience so far that year. No students mentioned any concerns related to school violence. All safety concerns were pandemic related.

In Spring of 2022, 4,100 students were asked what information schools and the Board should consider for the 2022 school year. Only one student mentioned school violence as a concern: "I think our school should be better next year because this year there was a lot of violence at school."

Toronto Police Service Data

For the purpose of this report the Toronto Police Service have shared data related to violent crimes (shootings, stabbings and assaults and robberies). The analysis of the data focuses on the age range from 12 – 29 broken down into the following 3 demographic groups; youth (12 -17 years), emerging adult (18 - 24 years) early adult (25- 29 years) for the calendar years of 2021 and 2022 (year to date).

From January 2021 – November 30, 2022 there were a total of 870 firearm related incidents in the City of Toronto resulting in 426 Victims. Young people between the ages of 12 – 29 accounted for 51.17% of all victims (7.75% were youth, 32.39% were emerging adults and 11.03% were early adults). Within this this same age group, Youth accounted for 17.42% of those accused, while early adults accounted for 65.17% and Early Adults accounting for 17.42%

From January 2021 – November 30, 2022, 622 young people between the ages of 12 – 29 were victimized by stabbings and 586 were accused. However, analysis identified an alarming 12.78% increase from 2021 – 2022 (Jan-Nov) in youth (12-17) who have been accused of stabbings.

A similar increase is noted for young people 12-29 accused of assaults or robberies. Youth (12-17) account for a 17.17% increase in assaults and an 8.44% increase in robberies.

The increase of violent incidents in TDSB schools corresponds with Toronto Police Service data related to an increase in violent incidents impacting young people within the City of Toronto.

Responding to the Data

Based on available data as well as most recent developments, it is of critical importance that the Board continue to act with great urgency to address issues of school and community safety. The Board cannot do this work alone. No one institution can address the intricacy, or in some cases, the urgency of community safety and well-being challenges on their own. All levels of government must be involved as part of responding to this issue and it is imperative that grassroots community agencies are engaged as well. This work intends to build and strengthen relationships, coordinate responses, share data and bring alignment and coherence to service delivery in communities directly in response to the [March 23, 2022](#), Board decision.

TDSB must engage in cross-sectoral working tables which collaboratively address the issues connected to community and school violence. TDSB is an active participant in the implementation of SafeTO: The City of Toronto's Ten-Year Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, 2021 which was developed in response to calls from community leaders to fundamentally shift in the ways in how the City thinks and acts about community safety by centering the well-being of people and places. SafeTO was also developed in response to Provincial legislation under the Community Safety & Policing Act that mandated all municipalities to prepare and adopt a plan. SafeTO acts as an umbrella strategy that enables a diverse and integrated range of skill, locally-driven mandates, programs and resources to address community needs under the guidance of a shared vision, data-driven outcomes, and community leadership supported by multi-sector collaboration.

The SafeTO Plan's states: The root causes of community violence, trauma and injustice are complex. A traditional enforcement approach cannot be the only response, nor the default response to building a safer city. Growing evidence calls for proactive, multisector responses guided by a unified vision and a set of agreed upon priorities. The SafeTO Plan involves multi-sector partners working in collaboration to promote community safety through a prism of well-being. Instead of relying on reactive emergency responses, the SafeTO plan calls for social development to create safer and healthier communities that are committed to Truth and Reconciliation, confronting racism and all other forms of oppression, thereby ensuring equitable delivery of services and resources across the City of Toronto. The report cites that those significant investments need to be "focused on developing or enhancing programs that fall under the following areas of social development: prevention; risk intervention; reducing reliance on emergency response; and strengthening Agenda Page 42 community capacity to promote and maintain safety and well-being."

At the [June 29, 2022](#) meeting, the Board passed a motion to formalize participation in the implementation SafeTO: Toronto's Ten-Year Community Safety and Well-Being Plan. The Board is actively supporting the [SafeTO Implementation Plan](#), TDSB participate on an Executive Leadership Table consisting of multi-sector partners and other levels of government who are working collaboratively to prevent violence through a public health approach. Through this collaboration TDSB staff work directly with City, institutional and community partners on the ongoing design and implementation of SafeTO throughout 2023.

TDSB Action Plan

We are proceeding with great urgency on the first phase of an action plan to address the issue of school and community safety. This work will be anchored in TDSB's ongoing commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, Human Rights, Equity, Anti-Oppression and Anti-Racism. This action plan reflects an intersectional perspective which aims to eliminate disproportionate outcomes for students.

Capturing and centering student voice is of critical importance in addressing issues related to school and community safety. Working in partnership with all internal and external TDSB stakeholders, including all levels of Government, community agencies, and faith-based groups is essential.

Phase 1

- 1. Additional Investment:** Dedicated oversight of Caring and Safe Schools with a review of the current service model to maximize service to schools (i.e. Caring and Safe School Advisors, School Based Safety Monitors). Additional positions will be added as follows:
 - two teachers to initiate a Caring and Safe Schools program designed to work with partners to build safer communities through awareness, advocacy, accountability, action and access. This program will triage students in youth justice detention facilities, TDSB students in adult detention facilities, TDSB students that are transitioned back into community and TDSB students not engaged in education or training. The students will have access to essential services including reintegration, education, housing support, mental health and well-being services, risk mitigation, violence prevention programming, reflective services and cultural consideration of care programming, etc.
 - two Caring and Safe School Advisors with expertise in community engagement and support, de-escalation and crisis response
 - two Child and Youth Counselors to work specifically with middle school grade 7 and 8 as a pilot program to support socio-emotional learning and

the development of problem solving, conflict resolution and help seeking skills

- one Student Equity Program Advisor to coordinate the activation of student voice relative to school and community safety
- three administrative positions to coordinate and operationalize the Audit function related to Caring and Safe Schools
- TDSB will also explore the potential for TDSB staff integration into the multi-sector structures under development under SafeTO

- 2. Compulsory Learning and Compliance Training:** Training related to Caring and Safe Schools will become mandatory and will be updated annually. The first phase of this training will include School Administrators, Superintendents of Education and Executive Superintendents. This training will include learning related to PR 697: Promoting Positive School climate and PR 695: Threats to School Safety and will emphasize culturally responsive leadership. The training will also identify enhanced communication protocols with and the role of City and community partners in assessing or responding to threats to school safety and recovering from violent traumatic incidents
- 3. Restorative Practice and Restorative Justice:** In collaboration with the Urban Indigenous Education Centre and relevant community partners, each school in the Board will receive training to implement Restorative Practices for conflict management and resolution
- 4. Audit Function:** The TDSB is introducing a CSS audit process for all schools in the Board. This process is intended to heighten system and school accountability and to create the safest possible schools by examining school climate, physical plant and compliance to the Board's policies and procedures
- 5. Expected Practices for Caring and Safe Schools:** To support the Audit function, staff will create the *Expected Practices for Caring and Safe Schools*. This guide will assist school based staff in the enhancement of school safety as it relates to school climate, physical plant and compliance to the Board's policies and procedures
- 6. Programs:** In response to student and community voice the Board will work with community partners to expand learning and recreational program offerings (including tutoring and mentorship) outside of regular school hours; the Board will expand partnerships with community agencies which include the presence of agencies working in schools during the regular school day and will expedite partnership agreements to enable their access.
- 7. Expert Table Reference Group:** The Board will coordinate an ad hoc reference group related to school and community safety with representation from recognized service providers across the City (e.g. The Centre for Mental Health and Addiction, Toronto Public Health, City of Toronto) and include students,

parents, Trustees, staff, and faith-based groups. This group will take a whole child approach to supporting the safety and well-being of children and youth and work with the City and other partners to not duplicate existing tables. This reference group will provide advice and make reports to the Board two/three times annually.

- 8. Partnerships:** The TDSB will expand partnerships with culturally responsive community organizations and faith-based groups in support of school and community safety; each Learning Centre within the Board will coordinate quarterly meetings which will include local community agencies, faith-based groups, senior staff including Superintendents of Education, local school staff and central staff.
- 9. Toronto Police Service:** The TDSB will continue to work with Toronto Police Service in ways which promote school and community safety including police presence at/in schools when deemed necessary based on school and community feedback
- 10. City of Toronto:** The TDSB will continue to partner with City programs (including the Youth Outreach Workers, TO Wards Peace, Community Crisis Response Program, FOCUS Toronto, Youth Development, Confronting Anti-Black Racism) and will enhance active participation in SafeTO by integrating senior staff into the operationalization of the initiative and developing communication plans across the board to maximize available support to schools. The TDSB will also work with the City to prioritize schools that require enhanced Youth Programming, Mental Health and Well-being and Food Security
- 11. Data and Technology:** The TDSB will expedite the installation of state-of-the-art cameras to replace current equipment in every school and explore other options which utilize technology to support safety and security. The TDSB will also work with the City on enhanced data sharing mechanisms to the advance prevention, intervention and prevention strategies of SafeTO
- 12. Communication Plan:** The TDSB will work to enhance communication plans across business units and administrations to ensure knowledge of community partnerships and supports and to maximize their impact. Further, the TDSB through their commitment to SafeTO will work with the City and community partners to develop locally driven anti-violence content
- 13. Priority Schools Initiative (PSI) Funding:** The TDSB will actively work towards the restoration of PSI funding (\$2.5 million) which supported the cost of providing school space to community groups on weekends and evenings; this funding was eliminated by the provincial government in February 2019.

Best Practices

TDSB research services has recently completed “*A Literature Scan on Best Practices for School Safety*” (Appendix B). The purpose of this report was to review the literature with a focus on best practices around school safety and positive school climate for the diverse student and staff population in TDSB schools. This review includes information about successful school and community safety programs. The review also highlights that school safety is not established with the implementation of a singular program or installation of security equipment. Effective school safety caters to students’ mental health; ensuring physical and psychological safety; and engaging various stakeholders like school administrators, students, teachers, families, and communities as partners.

The City of Toronto has also reported on community violence and its impact and its connection to Public Health in the following report *Community Violence: A Public Health Approach*- [Agenda Item History - 2019.HL11.1 \(toronto.ca\)](https://www.toronto.ca/agenda-item-history-2019-hl11.1)

TDSB has worked very closely over many years with established community agencies to deliver programming which enhances positive school and supports students in unique community driven ways. Two existing partnerships that exemplify this work involve Success Beyond Limits (SBL) and Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education (Y.A.A.A.C.E).

Success Beyond Limits (SBL)

Success Beyond Limits (SBL) is a collaborative community-based organization focused on education that extends into a variety of programs, excursions and supports for youth from Jane and Finch communities with an infrastructure of holistic care along their individual paths to success.

SBL’s focus is to reduce the impact of external factors that negatively affect the educational trajectory and success of youth in the Jane and Finch community. SBL operates a 6-week Summer Program that offers credits, mentorship, youth employment, social and academic enrichment, daily nutrition, excursions, increased school engagement, higher likelihood of graduation, networking opportunities and relationship building with their peers and a community of caring adults.

SBL continues to support youth through the operation of its unique Youth Space located inside Westview Centennial Secondary School, which is made possible by the ongoing partnership with the TDSB. Through this space, SBL staff support youth during the school day, run after-school programs, and connect youth to an array of diverse opportunities across the city. In addition, SBL assists in enacting non-punitive conflict resolution strategies and restorative justice methods in support of youth in the building.

Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education (Y.A.A.A.C.E)

Founded in 2007, Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education (Y.A.A.A.C.E) has been delivering culturally responsive and community driven youth programs while driving systemic change in partnership with many organizations including TDSB. Y.A.A.A.C.E is a community organization that seeks to engage children and youth from all communities – particularly those from marginalized and poor under-resourced communities through participation in year round comprehensive programming and activities (academics, athletics, recreation, technology and the arts). Y.A.A.A.C.E's mission statement is *Actions to Fulfill the Dream* and its mandate is twofold: to build capacity in all children and youth and enhance their capacity to become twenty-first century learners and global citizens.

The Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education (Y.A.A.A.C.E) uses a social inclusion framework that enables participants to access opportunities, engage in academic activities, build self-confidence, and enhance self-identification. Y.A.A.A.C.E's social inclusion framework is a socio-mechanism designed to impact the lives of children and youth so that they grow, learn and play in a context that is responsive and supportive of their needs, interests, expectations and aspirations, thereby enhancing the likelihood of them becoming twenty first century learners and global citizens.

Y.A.A.A.C.E will work with two TDSB teachers and through formalized partnerships and funded projects to re-engage students as described in the Resource Allocation above.

Conclusion

The work related to making schools and communities as safe as possible must proceed with great urgency and intensity. The items outlined in Phase One of this plan will be going into effect immediately. We cannot do this work alone or in isolation. We must be intentional in building trusting relationships with students, staff and communities. In order to be successful, student voice must be the primary driver of everything we do. We must work closely with, and learn from, the communities that we intend to serve. We will be accountable to our stakeholders by following up on the progress that is made related to Phase One of the Action Plan. This will be done in a public, timely and transparent manner. Phase Two of this plan will be informed by the lessons that we learn every day from working with students, staff, parents and communities. We will be relentless in our approach to creating the safest, most welcoming and inclusive schools that we can; these are the schools that our students, staff and communities expect, and these are the schools that they deserve.