



## **A Collaborative Approach to School and Community Safety: Report 1**

**To:** Special Planning and Priorities Committee

**Date:** 5 December, 2022

**Report No.:** 12-22-4452

### **Strategic Directions**

- Allocate Human and Financial Resources Strategically to Support Student Needs
- Transform Student Learning
- Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being
- Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students
- Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships Within School Communities to Support Student Learning and Well-Being

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the report be received

### **Context**

The highest priority of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) 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 practice. 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 being only the work of a single School Board. 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.

This report is the first in a series which intends to keep the Board updated, informed and actively involved in the work of creating safer, more welcoming and inclusive schools, workplaces and communities.

## **Action Plan and Associated Timeline**

The attached report *A Collaborative Approach to School and Community Safety- Report 1* (Appendix A) provides an overview of current research trends and data related to Caring and Safe Schools in Toronto District School Board and beyond. It also presents Phase One of an action plan which intends to urgently address issues of school and community violence. This action plan includes interventions which are being implemented immediately.

To enhance accountability, staff will update on progress that is made in relation to Phase One of the action plan in a follow up report. This follow-up will include financial implications and timelines for subsequent reports and will be presented to the Finance, Budget and Enrolment Committee (FBEC) in January of 2023. Phase Two of the action plan will also be included.

## **Resource Implications**

Financial implications and timelines for subsequent reports and updates will be presented to the FBEC in January of 2023.

## **Communications Considerations**

*A Collaborative Approach to school and community Safety- Report 1* will be shared with key stakeholders through existing TDSB communication channels and posted publicly on the TDSB's website.

## **Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)**

P037 Equity

P031 Human Rights

P051 Caring and Safe Schools

P069 Accessibility

PR523 Access to School Board Premises

PR540 Non-Discretionary and Discretionary Student Transfers

PR585 Board Code of Conduct

PR586 Programs for Students on Long Term Suspension or Expulsion

PR602 Hearing of and Appeal Under Section 265(1)(m) of the Education Act

PR608 Sexual Misconduct by Students

PR694 Video Surveillance

PR695 Threat to school Safety

REVISED

PR697 Promoting a Positive School Climate Procedure

PR698 Police-School Board Protocol

PR703 Bullying Prevention and Intervention

PR702 Progressive Discipline

PR710 Reporting of Suspected Wrongdoing

PR728 Reporting and Responding to Racism and Hate Incidents Involving or Impacting Students in Schools

PR724 Refusal to Admit

## Other Reference Documents

[TDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#)

## Appendices

- Appendix A: A Collaborative Approach to School and Community Safety- Report 1
- Appendix B: A Literature Scan on Best Practices for School Safety
- ~~Appendix C: Toronto Office to Prevent Gun Violence Interim Work Plan~~

## From

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## 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 \(toronto.ca\)](#)

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.



# **LITERATURE SCAN ON BEST PRACTICES FOR SCHOOL SAFETY**

**TITLE:** Literature scan on best practices for school safety

**AUTHOR(S):** Mandeep Kaur Gabhi

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## Introduction

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) is committed to creating spaces that are caring, safe, welcoming and respectful. All students have a right to feel safe at school and all caring adults in schools work to protect students, build positive relationships, create connections, solve problems, and promote respect. Student safety is a priority in the TDSB. School safety is considered an urgent priority for various stakeholders and community members of the Board. Creating safe schools involves reducing forms of physical, social, psychological, and emotional harm (Cornell, 2015; Jimerson et al., 2012; Mayer & Jimerson, 2019) and promoting feelings of safety essential for staff and students to have effective learning environments (DeVos & Nielsen, 2018; Osher & Kendziora, 2010).

The purpose of this report is to review the literature with focus on best practices around school safety and positive school climate for the diverse student and staff population in TDSB schools. School climate refers to 'how members of the school community experience the school, including interpersonal relationships, teacher and other staff practices, and organizational arrangements. School climate includes factors that serve as conditions for learning and that support physical and emotional safety, connection and support, and engagement' (Yoder et al., 2017). Provincial mandates define school climate as the learning environment and relationships in a school and school community. According to the Caring and Safe Schools policy (P051), *Positive School Climate* refers to a whole school approach that may be defined as the learning environment and relationships found within a school and school community. A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included, and accepted, and actively promote positive behaviours and interactions. As such, a positive school climate can be a crucial component in bullying prevention.

A positive school climate is strongly tied to school safety as the environment of the school influences student behavior, may affect students' mental health and help-seeking behavior, improves school attendance, and creates an atmosphere where students are willing to report threats of violence or other negative behavior in school (Mayo, 2017). These interventions and ideas range from afterschool programs, a need for paradigm shift, launching inter-departmental campaign as well as funding shifts.

However, 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.

Therefore, the report is divided into three sections:

- Key program descriptions, or pilots that address to school safety;
- Themes, or concepts;
- Considerations- integration of concepts within existing work

To ensure rigor and depth in research, several research databases were reviewed for theoretical and empirical research as well as past program analysis and evaluation reports of the various initiatives nationally and internationally undertaken to ensure safe schools for students.

### Literature review

Williams et al. (2022) examined the relationship of students' perceptions of school safety to feeling unsafe due to bullying victimization, stakeholder relations, schools' physical environment (negative and positive), and student's belongingness. The impact of experiencing bullying, community victimization, and violence has been consistently examined in the school safety literature (Aldridge et al., 2017; Brewer et al., 2017; Sulak, 2017; Vidourek et al., 2016; Thapa et al., 2013). Beyond the obvious physical dangers, students' perceptions of being unsafe have been associated negatively with grades and school attendance among students, as well as disengagement with daily lessons among high-risk students (Shumow & Lomax, 2001). All students, parents or guardians, teachers, staff, and community members have the right to be safe and feel safe, in their school community. With this right comes the responsibility for everyone to be accountable for their actions and contribute to a positive school climate (Government of Ontario, 2022).

School climate and school safety while conceptualized and empirically studied at the individual student level; they represent constructs that characterize institutions wherein normative understanding as well as experiences are created, maintained, or reinforced (Toomey et al., 2012). Literature on how to establish safe schooling has highlighted that having positive social connections, mutual trust and sense of belonging are shown to have a positive effect on the students and staff at the schools. School-based interventions for school safety have a positive effect not only on students' behaviour (e.g., Espelage, 2015; Wilson & Lipsey, 2007), but also on teachers' confidence and preparedness in tackling bullying (Ahtola, 2012). Research shows that exclusionary discipline strategies, such as suspension and expulsion increase the likelihood of challenging behaviour (Hemphill et al., 2006). Moreover, reactionary exclusionary discipline is provided disproportionately to students from culturally diverse backgrounds (Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 1997). During this literature review there were

many programs and initiatives which were highlighted in the literature; however, for the purpose of this report it was prioritised to include programs which were adapted for contextually similar backdrop and make up as TDSB's student and community population.

### Pilot program suggestions

The following six pilot programs highlight the different ways in which the schools are turned into safer, more welcoming, and student-centered spaces for the students and the community. These programs have been piloted as well as evaluated for their effectiveness in establishing a positive school safety climate.

#### 1. KiVa Antibullying Program

The KiVa (an acronym for Kiusaamista Vastaa against bullying) is a whole school antibullying intervention program designed to prevent and decrease bullying among students. At present in Finland, more than 90% of the schools have adopted the KiVa antibullying program, financed by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. Globally, Belgium, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Sweden and the United Kingdom are some of the places where in KiVa program has been adapted and implemented. KiVa uses three main elements: prevention, intervention and monitoring as the foundation of the program (KiVa Program, & University of Turku. (n.d.)). The **preventive actions**, such as the KiVa curriculum, student lesson plans, activity cards, are directed at all students and focus on preventing bullying. The **interventive actions** in KiVa are targeted specifically to the children and adolescents who have been involved in bullying. The primary rationale behind the same is to provide schools and students with solution-focused tools on how to put an end to bullying. KiVa offers tools to **monitor** the implementation and success of the program in the schools through annual online surveys for both students and staff so that the feedback can help the school on how to improve their antibullying work.

KiVa curriculum and activities focus on influencing the students to reduce rewards gained by the bullies and, consequently their motivation to bully (Kärnä et al., 2011). The curriculum is designed to promote skills in the students to support their fellow students to establish a safe school environment and increase their coping strategies when victimized. However, for establishing the KiVa program as a whole school approach and to create a sense of safety in school; it is essential to recognize the role of parents and teachers. The KiVa curriculum has guidelines for the parents and teachers to building their understanding of bullying and their commitment to tackle elements and aspects that can create unsafe spaces in schools (Salmivalli et al., 2010). Teachers are trained and issued with special vests to wear in the schoolyard to enhance their visibility.

Several project evaluations (e.g., Saarento et al., 2015; Ahotla et al., 2012; Johander et al., 2020; Ttofi & Farrington, 2011) have assessed the effectiveness and applicability of the program by highlighting the success of peer support groups for victims of bullying and cooperative group work among experts in dealing with children involved in bullying, and visual learning environments (e.g., computer games involving bullying) to change students' attitudes about bullying; to name a few.

### 2. The Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme

The Cool Schools Peer Mediation program was first ideated in the 1980s. The programme was developed in collaboration with the Peace Foundation, Students and Teachers Education for Peace and the Mobile Peace Van. The Cool School program (Barruel, 2011) encourages peaceful conflict resolution in schools through mediators who become altruistic leaders after acquiring skills to serve their communities. The Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme enables students to act as third-party mediators between two or more of their peers, who want help to resolve their conflict constructively and peacefully. Mediation is a process in which a neutral person or persons help disputants to find a positive, mutually acceptable solution to their dispute. Mediation is both a voluntary and confidential process. This enables the students to develop the values, knowledge and competencies that will help enable them to live full and satisfying lives by creating a safe school environment.

The success of the programme is dependent on how supportive the surrounding environment is toward this approach to human interactions (Barruel, 2011). The school environment, that is, the way that teachers and pupils relate to each other and the way the school is structured, therefore significantly influences any attempts at peer mediation. The school environment also needs to be one that values diversity and actively combats all forms of prejudice and discrimination. Appendix A shares a snapshot of how the Peer Mediation Programme can be set up in a school system as a part of a whole school approach whole engaging students, teachers and parents in a school. While the Cool School Peer Mediation is designed for students in Year 1 -8; the program is extended into secondary school Leadership Through Peer Mediation Program for years 9-13 wherein the students are trained to develop skills to be a peer mediator. Students are enabled to become 'ambassadors of social justice' or 'peace ambassadors', student leaders in the school community promoting fairness and respect for all students, watching out for harassment, and bullying and helping students to get the support they may need. Research conducted by the New Zealand's Ministry of Education (Carroll-Lind, 2009) reported that schools saw a drastic decline in numbers of conflicts, reduction in bullying and students referred to staff for resolving conflicts. They also reported students showing more empathy and improved communication skills to resolve conflict themselves.

### 3. Olweus Bullying Prevention Program

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) was first implemented and evaluated in the First Bergen Project against Bullying, a longitudinal study that followed approximately 2,500 school children over a period of two-and a half year, from 1983 to 1985 (Olweus, 1993). The main goals of the OBPP were to reduce bullying related issues among students at school, prevent the development of new bullying problems, and achieve better peer relations at school (Olweus et al., 1999; Olweus et al., 2007). Under the program these goals are met by restructuring of the child's social environment at school so as to to reduce both opportunities and rewards for engaging in bullying behavior and to build a sense of community among students and adults within the school environment. The program aims to reduce existing bullying problems among students at school, prevent the development of new bullying problems, and achieve better peer relations at school (Olweus, 1993; Olweus et al., 1999; Olweus et al., 2007).

The OBPP is based on four key principles according to which the adults at school should: (a) show warmth and positive interest and be involved in the students' lives; (b) set firm limits to unacceptable behavior; (c) consistently use nonphysical, nonhostile negative consequences when rules are broken; and (d) function as positive role models (Olweus, 2001). Several school-based anti-bullying programs inspired by the OBPP have been implemented and evaluated in various countries including Belgium, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada. In Ontario, Peel District School Board has adapted OBPP program as a part of its bullying prevention initiative for students in elementary, middle, and high school (ages 6 to 17 years) as a part of their school-based anti-bullying programs for safe schools (Region of Peel Health Services, 2014).

### 4. The Friends Programmes

'Fun Friends', 'Friends for Life' and 'My Friends Youth' are school-based anxiety prevention and resilience building programmes developed by Dr. Paula Barrett in Australia. The World Health Organisation cites 'Friends for Life' as the only evidence-based programme for anxiety in children that is effective at all levels of intervention (World Health Organization, 2004). Friends programmes helps students to develop resilience by teaching them effective strategies to cope with, problem solve and manage all kinds of emotional distress, including worry, stress, change and anxiety. Skills learned throughout the programme help students both now and in later life. The programme can be run by teachers as a whole class programme, or as a small group intervention. FRIENDS is an acronym for the skills taught throughout the programme (Friends for life, n.d.):

Feelings.

Remember to Relax. Have quiet time.

I can do it! I can try (Inner helpful thoughts)

Explore Solutions and Coping Step Plans.

Now reward yourself! You've done your best!

Don't forget to practice.

Smile! Stay calm, Stay Strong and talk to your support networks!

The program is implemented in the United Kingdom by the Early Intervention Foundation (2017) as *FRIENDS for life*; a school-based intervention, which comprises of 10–12 weekly sessions of one hour each. It is delivered in a group format by teachers to students. The intervention uses a play-based and experiential learning approach to provide cognitive behavioural skills in a developmentally appropriate manner. During each session children are taught skills aimed at developing their coping skills through stories, games, videos, and activities. Cooley-Strickland (2011) evaluated the efficacy of a school-based anxiety prevention program among urban children exposed to community violence and it was observed anxiety symptoms significantly decreased in student participants.

#### 5. PeaceBuilders

PeaceBuilders (Boccanfuso & Kuhfeld, 2011) is a schoolwide program for students in grades K through 12 that is designed to prevent youth violence and reward positive behavior. The program has been implemented in more than 1,200 schools and organizations in the United States of America over the last 10 years. In the program, the students learn five principles: seek out opportunities to praise people; avoid put-downs; seek wise people as advisors and friends; notice and correct hurts we cause; and right wrongs. Participants also learn nine techniques that can be used to reinforce these principles by using teachers as role models, practicing positive behavior through role playing, and rehearsing positive responses to negative events. Two experimental evaluations of PeaceBuilders in and Arizona elementary schools indicated that the program increased social skills and peaceful behavior and decreased aggressive behavior in students in one year after they completed the program, thereby contributing to creating a safe and caring school environment. The impact of PeaceBuilders was largest for students who scored higher on measures of aggression at the start of the intervention (Vazsonyi et al., 2004).

### 6. Ambassadors Program

Safe School Ambassadors (SSA) is a student-centered bystander education program developed by Community Matters to reduce bullying/mistreatment and enhance school climate and safety (Pack et al., 2011). The SSA program is facilitated around equipping the students (Ambassadors) with nonviolent communication and intervention skills to stop bullying and violence among students. The Ambassadors are trained to identify, prevent, and respond to student aggression and mistreatment by being proactive and helpful bystanders. The SSA program is a departure from both the more traditional outside-in, adult-driven approaches but rather represents the ecological perspective on bullying discussed by Espelage and Swearer (2004).

A social-ecological perspective would thereby attribute the development of aggressive behavior in school children posits the interaction of individual and communal factors like family and peer interactions as influence on an individual's propensity to engage in aggressive behaviors (Espelage, 2004). The program highlights the need to change the conditions in the social environment that permit bullying to occur. The SSA program seeks to improve the school environment by harnessing the social power of certain students to influence their peers to stop or refrain from engaging in hurtful or violent behaviors, thereby over time shifting the underlying social norms that govern these behaviors.

### 7. The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative

The Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative was launched in 1999 under the umbrella of The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) in the United States of America. The Safe schools/healthy students initiative addressed the mental, emotional, and behavioral health of students and ensures students' safety in their schools. This program provided grants for the development of community-wide operations to create safe schools and promoting healthy childhood development. The program intended to prevent violence and the illegal use of drugs thereby promoting safety and discipline in schools by coordinating with other community-based organizations.

Research (Addington, 2009; Bachman et al., 2011; Schreck & Miller, 2003) has shown that the presence of metal detectors, security cameras, or guards in schools negatively impacts students' perceptions of safety and even increases fear among some students. Instead, according to the National Association of School Psychologists (2018) school mental health services are integral to student success because mental health directly affects the development and learning of children and adolescents (Fleming et al., 2005; Welsh et al., 2001). School mental health services positively impact school climate, and produce declines in suspension,



grade retention, and disciplinary etc. (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). School mental health services have been found to improve aspects of the school climate (Brunns et al., 2004).

### Core concepts within Effective Approaches to School Safety

#### 1. Adapting a Trauma Informed School Approach

Trauma-informed systems integrate practices that incorporate safety, trust, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and culture (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). Trauma-Informed School Systems are provisions of training and professional development for all school staff (teaching and non-teaching) to increase their awareness and knowledge about how trauma can affect students' social, emotional, behavioral, and academic functioning. Same can be achieved by practices within a school that influence a positive school climate, such as a safe school environment and strong school engagement with students and families (Kataoka et al, 2018). Positive school climate is associated with less bullying and harassment, improved school achievement and attendance, and better student mental health (Thapa et al., 2013).

A successful of implementation of Trauma Informed school system is the pilot project at Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD); a large urban school district serving 664,774 students in grades K-12, with 80% of students living in poverty and 21% of students classified as English language learners. LAUSD schools are offering a multitiered system of trauma-informed supports where in Tier 1 involved universal prevention programs, such as the Resilience Classroom Curriculum; Tier 2 is focussed group prevention interventions, such as the Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (Stein et al., 2003) and Tier 3 is intensive treatments, such as Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for students. A similar implementation model was adapted as a part of the University of California, San Francisco's Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS) program; to promote a whole school trauma-informed approach (Appendix B).

#### 2. Restorative justice

Restorative justice is 'justice that puts its energy into the future, not into what is past. It focuses on what needs to be healed, what needs to be repaired, what needs to be learned in the wake of a crime. It looks at what needs to be strengthened if such things are not to happen again' (Sharpe, 1998). Restorative Action is shifting away from punishment and using a different way to respond to conflict and harm in our schools, while proactively developing skills for building and maintaining relationships. Sharpe (1998) offers five touchstones of restorative justice: inviting complete participation and consensus; healing what has been broken; seeking

full and direct accountability; reuniting what has been divided; and strengthening the community to prevent further harms. While each school's journey to implementation and adaptation of restorative justice is unique; Oakland Unified School District detailed outline (Appendix C) on creating a restorative school highlighting how restorative action seeks to repair and address the root causes of conflict.

Several studies have reported links between implementing restorative practices and improved overall school climate (e.g., Mirsky, 2007; González, 2012; Jain et al., 2014) and increased feelings of school connectedness among students (McMorris et al., 2013). The Langley Restorative Action Program in British Columbia is a partnership program between Community Justice Initiatives Association and the Langley School District and has been supporting Langley school communities since 2000. Similarly, Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board as well as Waterloo Region District School Board have incorporated aspects of restorative justice in their schools' approach to make schools a safe space for students. Some of the ways that the Restorative Action Program was implemented in these schools were:

- Restorative Mediation

The restorative mediation process is a voluntary option for students who have experienced conflict or harm at school. A trained facilitator first meets individually with each person involved or impacted to explain the process and better understand their perspective and needs. The facilitator works with each individual to unpack the situation with a restorative lens.

- Peace Circles

A proactive restorative process whereby a larger group meets together in a circle to speak, listen, enhance relationships, support one another, and participate in exercises designed to foster a sense of community and build skills for navigating conflict. The Peace Circle program supports students in developing the communication, listening and conflict resolution skills to assist in overcoming social challenges and dealing with conflict in a confident and empathic way.

- Restorative justice conference

Restorative justice conferencing is used to address serious incidents of harm in the school community by gathering the people most affected by the harm or wrongdoing together to talk about: (1) what happened; (2) how the incident has affected them; and (3) how to repair the harm done (Morrison, 2013). Once the conference is convened, all participants sit in a circle to listen to the consequences of the incident and what needs to be done to right the wrongs and to get the lives of the offenders and victims back on track.

### 3. Culturally Responsive School Leadership

Culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) encompasses aspects of anti-oppressive/racist leadership (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Kumashiro, 2000), transformative leadership (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Shields, 2010), and social justice leadership (Bogotch, 2002; Theoharis, 2007) by identifying and institutionalizing practices that affirm Indigenous and authentic cultural practices of students. A culturally responsive leader at the schools would be someone with an understanding and criticality to realize the impact of “institutionalized racism on their own lives and the lives of the students and families they work with and embraces their role in mitigating, disrupting, and dismantling systemic oppression” (The Leadership Academy, 2021, p. 4). Culturally responsive leaders develop and support the school staff and promote a climate that makes the whole school welcoming, inclusive, and accepting of minoritized students. Black, Latinx, and students from low SES face a hostile school climate and are often being pulled and pushed out of school (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011; Khalifa, 2010; Lee & Burkam, 2003). However, CRSL would equip the policy makers and administrators in schools recognize that low school performance for students of color is directly related to the educators in the buildings that serve these students (Khalifa et al., 2016).

This process has worked successfully across several contexts; namely community accountability conferences (Education Queensland); school forums (New South Wales Department of Education and Training); community group conferencing (Colorado School Mediation Center); community conferencing (Calgary Community Conferencing); and restorative conferencing (Home Office, England) (Cameron & Thorsborne, 2000). Since TDSB’s Equity Policy (2018) commits to providing students with support in culturally responsive and socially sensitive manner; it would be vital to engage principals and school leadership in creating a roadmap for a culturally responsive school system. One such example is the culturally responsive school system roadmap created by The Leadership Academy to offer the schools and school leaders a rubric to create culturally responsive school system (Appendix D).

### Considerations

As detailed at the start, School Safety is a broader concept than can be addressed in singular program work. The concept often is most effective when integrated within many aspects of school practices and climate. According to Szalacha (2003) Gay-Straight Alliance (GSAs) have the most salient impact on school climate for gender nonconforming and LGBTQ students. The presence of a GSA is associated with safe school climates for all students (O’Shaughnessy et al., 2004; Russell et al., 2009. Literature (Toomey, 2012) indicates that when schools included lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) issues in the curriculum and had a Gay-Straight Alliance, students perceived their schools as safer. Since school climates

reflect broader pressures of heteronormativity as salient in adolescence; studies have shown that middle and high school students are at risk for victimization at school when they do not conform to norms regarding gender (Chesir-Teran, 2003; Aspenlieder et al., 2009; Wyss, 2004) or sexuality (D'Augelli et al., 2006). The presence of a GSA is also linked with fewer reports of victimization and better academic and health outcomes for students (Goodenow et al., 2006; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2004; Szalacha, 2003). GSAs have been associated with decreased peer victimization among LGBT students and can contribute to more positive school climates (Stathatos et al., 2016).

In 2013 GLSEN survey, LGBT students who attended schools with GSAs reported hearing homophobic comments and negative comments about gender expression less frequently. When such incidents did occur, students in schools with GSAs were more likely to report that staff regularly intervened. Fewer students at the schools with GSAs reported feeling unsafe regarding their sexual orientation or gender expression, with fewer reporting having missed school as a result of corresponding safety concerns and more reporting feeling connected to school (Scherr & Mayer, 2019). However, the work and impact of measure undertaken by the Board for creating a safe school environment for students from 2SLGBTQIA+ communities is not completed yet, as in a recent research on school climate among Transgender high school students, it was shared that they do not feel safe at school and experience bullying, which can be a contributing factor to high absenteeism (Pampati et al., 2018). One of the recommendations is including health professionals such as nurses within the school to help improve school climate for transgender youth by supporting bullying prevention programs (David-Ferdon et al., 2016) and the appropriate implementation of anti-bullying policies. While various stakeholders in the school; administration, teachers, students and parents/caregiver play a pivotal role in ensuring school safety; there is also a wide scope of literature that recognizes a unique need to collaborate with other professionals like nurse practitioners (Pampati et al., 2018). The Center of Excellence for Transgender Health (2016) has compiled a series of guidelines for the care of transgender and gender nonbinary people, which may be useful for school nurses. Included in these guidelines are steps providers could potentially take to create a safe and welcoming environment for transgender people, including promoting cultural humility, staff training on transgender health issues, and collecting gender identity data (Center of Excellence for Transgender Health, 2016).

The eleven suggestions and programs shared above are a small snapshot of the vast literature that exists on the school programs and interventions that can be looked at as best practices around the world to make out classrooms and schools safer for the students. Feeling safe at school is associated with classroom engagement, academic success, and overall student well-being and hence, peer support and disciplinary structure in the school are essential components of a safe school environment that is conducive to learning (Cornell, 2016).

Perceptions of safety for students and their sense of belonging to the school increases when students engage in positive student and teacher relations and can trust their teachers (Akiba, 2010; Mitchell et al. 2018).

Different programs discussed above have potential to be built upon existing TDSB undertakings for creating safe schools; for example, the evidence-based approach of the KiVa program would be a value added to the student climate surveys that TDSB undertakes. The findings from student climate surveys can assist the Board as well as schools to better identify and adapt tools based on the core guidelines of the KiVa Antibullying program. Coaches can be trained to be licensed partners and trainers in the KiVa Antibullying program while engaging other stakeholders in a progressive professional development over time. Similarly, since Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is not a prescribed curriculum but rather a whole school training for various stakeholders and members of the school; the core principles and rules can be integrated into existing policies and programs at the Board. Also, while each of these programs can be undertaken at the Board level; there are also nuances and ability to modify and implement each of these program recommendations according to the specific needs of the school site, their population composition as well as the other uniqueness of each site while also ensuring that all the stakeholders, components like physical infrastructure and curriculum as well as policy mandates guiding them are conceptually aligned.

## Appendix A: The Cool School Peer Mediation Program

### STEP 1

## SECURING SUPPORT FROM PRINCIPAL, BOARD OF TRUSTEES, STAFF AND PARENTS

#### Principal and Board of Trustees Support

Support from the principal and Board of Trustees is vital in order to establish a peer mediation programme in the school. Ideally your school principal will already be in support of the programme. However if you need to present the programme to the principal and/or Board of Trustees to gather their support, the following would be useful to describe:

- How the programme would operate.
- The benefits to the school—linkages with school vision, ethos and values. (see *Section 1*)
- The benefits to the pupils, both socially and academically.
- Alignment with New Zealand curriculum.
- The time commitment required of both staff and pupils.
- Anything else the school may need to provide.

*'Cool Schools provides a sound framework for teachers and students to resolve their differences in a positive way'*

(PRINCIPAL)

#### School Commitment

In order to establish a successful peer mediation programme the school will need to commit itself to the following:

- At least one teacher (Cool Schools Coordinator) to be made responsible for overall management and supervision of the programme. In larger schools a team comprising of one teacher from each syndicate/team can help share the coordinator role.
- The whole staff needs to attend the Cool Schools Training (5 hours) facilitated by a Peace Foundation Cool Schools regional trainer. This will be arranged at a time that suits the school.
- Peer Mediation can be integrated into the Health and Physical Education curriculum and can be taught as a health education unit at all levels (see curriculum links in section one). Teachers can provide a space for a 'Cool Schools Corner' in their classrooms.
- Selecting a variety of senior students to be the playground peer mediators. These students must represent the true character of the school.
- Providing school time for the Cool Schools Coordinator to train the school peer mediators and to have regular meetings to support the students in this role.
- Provide training material and equipment for mediators (available from The Peace Foundation). This includes identification of mediators e.g. vests and badges.
- Participate in regular support offered by The Peace Foundation. Revisits and attendance at your local Coordinator Network Meeting are highly recommended to keep the programme robust and energised.

## Staff Support

Whole staff training has proved to be by far the most successful way to implement the programme. If one or two teachers have been trained at a Cool School Peer Mediation Programme workshop, they can implement the programme but it will usually be a partial model of just training mediators. The programme will not be resilient in the school without whole staff development.

Peer mediation needs to be understood, supported and embraced by school staff in order to be effective. Staff support is needed for teachers to feel confident in teaching the mediation skills and the mediation process within their own classes. Teachers need to encourage pupils to use peer mediation when in a conflict situation.

*Peer mediation needs to be understood, supported and embraced by school staff in order to be effective.*

Once boundaries have been established by the school as to what issues are suitable to be dealt with by the peer mediators, it is important that settlements reached through mediation are accepted by the teachers. This will help ensure the process is not undermined by staff imposing their own disciplinary measures on students who have reached agreement (except in exceptional circumstances).

When seeking to introduce the Cool Schools Programme the following are possible ways of informing staff and soliciting feedback from them about it:

- Having a general staff discussion about the school approach to conflict resolution strategies and discipline.
- Announcing the possibility of establishing a peer mediation programme at a staff meeting and outlining the basics.
- Making available relevant information in section one and the mediation process as an introduction for staff to read.
- Survey the teachers on conflict resolution techniques used (see example provided or the Coordinator's Kit for additional questionnaires).
- Setting aside time at a subsequent staff meeting to seek agreement on implementation of the programme.
- Explaining the benefits of peer mediation after implementing it in the classroom and basing the explanation on personal experience.
- Whole-staff training is the most effective and successful way to implement the programme. All research supports this conclusion. This training will be facilitated by a Cool Schools Trainer.



## STEP 2

# TEACHER PREPARATION AND TRAINING

*The Cool Schools Peer Mediation Programme is a whole school programme, therefore the teaching, support and key relieving staff should do the five hour training which is facilitated by a Cool Schools Regional Trainer.*

The school Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), Board of Trustee members, caretaker and school bus driver/s can also be invited to attend. All adults in the school community will benefit from the training. In small schools, parents can be invited to build up the number of participants for the training. It is desirable to have at least 10 participants so that interactive group work and role-play is possible.

The skills learnt throughout the training are valuable for both personal and professional use by teachers. The training is also beneficial in enabling teachers to act as mediators for teacher/teacher conflicts, teacher/parent

conflicts and teacher/pupil conflicts should the school decide to make the mediation programme available for these.

It is essential for the coordinator to have undertaken training in order to effectively train the peer mediators and to supervise the implementation of the programme. In addition to this training the coordinator will also have ongoing support from their Cool Schools Regional Trainer in the form of revisits, regional network meetings and teacher training workshops.

Cool School Coordinators who are new to the role can attend a workshop held by The Peace Foundation. Please contact your Cool Schools Regional Trainer or The Peace Foundation to find out about the next workshop in your region.



## STEP 3

# TEACHING MEDIATION SKILLS AND THE PROCESS TO ALL STUDENTS

*Before selection and training of the school peer mediators by the Cool Schools Coordinator, it is recommended that the mediation skills and the process be taught in all classes.*

By incorporating mediation skills in the health curriculum plan, the programme will become integrated into the school culture and teachers can continue to reinforce the skills throughout the year.

It is recommended that classes also establish a class mediator roster. These students are available to assist their peers with 'small stuff' conflict within the classroom. Junior classes can work the junior class model (see Section 2). Class mediators can be on going even when school mediators are in action.

Constant reinforcement and support of the mediators and the mediation programme in the classroom will also assist to raise the profile and improve the effectiveness of the programme. Adopting a whole school approach also encourages teachers and children to develop a sense of ownership of the programme.

The ultimate aim of the programme is to have all children using the skills to solve their own conflicts.

### SUMMARY OF THE SKILL SECTIONS (SECTION 2)

#### Part 1: Understanding Conflict

- Session 1. Defining Conflict
- Session 2. Responses to Conflict

#### Part 2: The Mediation Process

- Session 3. Role of the Mediator
- Session 4. The Mediation Process
- Session 5. Problem Solving and Creating Agreements That Work

#### Part 3: Effective Mediation Skills

- Session 6. Active Listening
- Session 7. Identifying and Expressing Feelings
- Session 8. Using 'I' Statements
- Session 9. Effective Questioning
- Session 10. Handling Difficult Situations



## STEP 4 SELECTION AND TRAINING OF THE SCHOOL MEDIATORS

*Ideally the selected school mediators would have already done the skill sessions as part of their classroom programme and are on the classroom mediator roster.*

Therefore the Cool Schools Coordinator's job can focus on revision of the basic mediation skills, practising the mediation process and discussion on handling difficult situations. Where school mediators are from different classes they are trained as a group. It is advisable that this training be done during school time so that both students and teachers give full commitment. Refer to the Coordinator Kit for outlines of peer mediator training workshops.

### QUALITIES OF MEDIATORS

Students selected to be mediators should demonstrate:

- *Good listening skills.*
- *Respect of peers, or ability to gain this respect.*
- *Good verbal skills or ability to learn the language of conflict resolution.*
- *Initiative and be well organised.*
- *Willingness to try new things.*
- *Ability to sustain a commitment to the programme.*
- *A positive attitude*
- *Trustworthiness*

Students selected to be peer mediators should reflect the school's population as closely as possible with regard to ethnicity and gender. It is advisable that you have students from the top two or three year levels in the school team, for example, year 5 and 6 students in a contributing primary or year 6, 7 and 8 students in full primary. Remember that the role of school mediator is a leadership opportunity.

Beware of selecting only 'good' pupils. Students who may be labelled as 'rebels' often have skills those 'good' pupils don't have, including experience at being in difficult conflict situations. Experience shows that 'rebels' often make excellent mediators. Do not overload the school mediation team with students given the job to improve their own behaviour. Pair these individuals with partners who have more developed social skills. A trial period is useful and the criteria for success in the job needs to be set. If playground mediation proves too difficult, then a school peer mediator may choose to stay with role of class mediator only.

### Numbers

It is advisable for coordinators to train at least enough student mediators so that they are not on duty more than once a week. Mediators always work in pairs in order to support each other. The numbers of mediators to be trained depends on the size of the school. Mediators are on duty at lunchtime and sometimes at morning interval as well. Training 25 mediators allow two pairs on each day with one reserve available.

Schools adapt numbers to suit their needs but it is advisable not to train large groups of school mediators as this can reduce the effectiveness of the training and the service given by the team. Students on the reserve list will need to be frequently changed so that they feel part of the active team. Practice makes perfect—the more often a mediator has the opportunity to practice mediation, the more confident they will feel in the role. This helps in keeping their interest alive.

## STEP 4: SELECTION AND TRAINING OF THE SCHOOL MEDIATORS

*(continued)*

### **Recruitment**

Mediators are offering an important service to their peers and their school. Therefore the position of the mediator should be one that is valued and holds prestige. It is important that students who volunteer or are nominated for selection as mediators, know what it is they will be committing themselves to. A good way to do this is for the coordinator to visit each senior class revising the mediation process, informing the students about the process for selection and answering questions. This process can also be done in a senior syndicate/team assembly. DVD clips can be used here.

Ideas for recruiting mediators can include job adverts and job applications — why I want to be a mediator etc. See the Coordinator's Kit for job description and application form ideas.

### **Ideas for Training New Mediators**

As older students are usually the school mediators, a problem can arise when they leave at the end of the year and no experienced mediators remain. One way

to handle this situation is for experienced mediators to co-train with new mediators in term four. They take on the role of 'teacher' and pass on their expertise to enable a smooth transition for the next group. For example, establish a 'mediator apprenticeship' in term four for new students keen on the role for the following year.

See Coordinator's Kit for sample training and workshop plans.

### **Motivating Mediators**

After the first wave of enthusiasm is over, some children may become less motivated. This also happens when the programme is going well and few conflicts are happening in the playground — good news indeed! However, bored mediators are not necessarily happy mediators.



## STEP 5

# PUBLICISING AND IMPLEMENTING THE PROGRAMME

### Post-Training Organisational Meeting

Following the training it is advisable to hold an organisational meeting with the mediators. The purpose of this meeting is to organise details such as the roster, location for mediations, weekly meeting time and publicity. The meeting can also be used to explain the use of mediation forms and the check-back arrangement. Mediators (especially years 7 and 8) should be consulted about what uniform they prefer.

### Publicity

Once the school peer mediators are trained and ready to do playground duty they need to do a presentation in assembly. The Cool School mediators can take the lead in introducing their role in the playground to the rest of the students in the school.

One effective way is to role-play a conflict and mediation. The Cool Schools Coordinator can help the mediators prepare the assembly presentation, which can also include raps, banners, a power point presentation or a puppet show. It is recommended that school time be given to the planning and preparation for the assembly presentation. Refer to Coordinator's Kit for ideas for peer mediator assembly presentations.

Assemblies can also provide a good forum for ongoing reminders to the students about the mediation service. Daily notices whether they are via email or the school intercom system are useful for announcing which mediators are on duty and serve as a reminder for the mediators themselves.

Parents can be invited to the assembly and the mediators can be presented with a 'Certificate of Achievement' once they have finished training. A graduation certificate, badge or mediator ID can be presented when the mediators have completed a period of committed and reliable service.

Another way of raising the profile of the mediators is for them to teach a 'virtue of the week' in assembly and give awards to students who practise that virtue in the playground.

### Cool Schools Road Show

Peer mediation is about students helping students. Once the school mediators have done their assembly presentation, before they go on duty in the playground, they need to do a Cool Schools Road Show around all the classrooms. Teams of four mediators do a presentation in each classroom similar to the assembly presentation. Children can ask questions of the mediators and mediators can ask students to support them appropriately. The aim is to build rapport between the mediators and other students. The Road Show needs to be adapted for the junior classes. It is especially important to visit year one classes several times per year, as new pupils are enrolled to the school. Refer to the Coordinator's Kit for an outline of a Cool School Road Show.

### Identification

Mediators on duty need something to identify them as duty mediators; vests and badges are available from The Peace Foundation. Sometimes mediators choose to design their own uniform, such as t-shirts with a printed design and logo often sponsored by a community organisation. It is important to have a discussion with the mediators to decide on the identification to be used early on in the training, so that it can be available for use once the training is completed.

### Location of Mediation

Many schools have roving pairs who have designated duty areas i.e. junior, middle or senior school. When the programme first begins it is useful to have a quiet location easily supervised by duty staff, where mediations can take place without distractions from bystanders. Another option is a 'Mediation Station' (sometimes a sun umbrella and chairs) where mediations can be conducted. Alternatively, one pair of mediators can sit while another pair roams. These two pairs interchange their positions every 15 minutes so that the seated pair is not sitting for too long. The Mediation Station can be created and built by mediators. It works particularly well in the junior school area.



**Peer Mediator School Team**

Display a photo board in the office foyer of the Peer Mediators in the school team. These should be profile shots with a name caption underneath. All visitors then have the opportunity to recognise these student leaders who are providing a valuable service to the school.

**Mediator Managers**

Nominate two senior, experienced and responsible mediators from your school team to be Mediator Managers (MMs). These students can assist the coordinator by doing day to day administration work e.g. giving the names of the mediators on duty for the daily notices, preparing the clipboards each day, and checking mediators have 'signed in' for their duty. The Mediation Managers can be changed each term to give other students an opportunity to undertake this role.

**Roster**

Display a copy of the duty mediators' roster in each classroom, in the office and staffroom to ensure that teachers and pupils will be reminded who is on duty each day. Mediators should introduce themselves to the duty teachers so that small problems can be referred to them. Teachers can make referrals but children can choose the support of either the mediators or teachers.

Reserve mediators will need to be available for when a duty mediator is absent, due to sickness, sports or other out-of-school activities. There are a variety of ways you can manage reserve mediators or replacements. One option is to have a reserve mediator roster for each day of the week and they will fill in when needed. The reserve mediators need to be changed every two weeks or so. This responsibility is to be shared within the team.

Alternatively, if for any reason a mediator knows in advance they are unable to mediate on their rostered day, they can be encouraged to find a replacement from the school mediation team. A good idea used in some schools is that mediators can only do one extra duty per week. This ensures it is not the same people who are always asked to be replacements.

However you manage your reserve mediator system, having a log in book for mediators to 'sign in' before they commence duty, is a good way for the coordinator to keep a check on changes and replacements.

**Equipment**

Duty mediators will need to be supplied with a clipboard for carrying the necessary forms, a pen, and uniform for easy identification in the playground. The forms that we recommend duty mediators to carry on their clipboards are:

- The Mediation Process (reminder sheet for mediators clipboard).
- Mediation Agreement Form.
- A list of suitable questions to assist with finding solutions.
- An arrangement of words that correspond to the school values that can be used as prompts for questions e.g. Respect—this school values respect. How could you show respect to stop this problem happening again?

**Mediation of Serious Disputes**

In a primary school, teachers deal with serious disputes. It is advisable to spend some time with school mediators discussing which problems they should refer to a teacher. These can be presented as 'what if...?' scenarios.

**Daily Check-In**

Mediating conflicts will be a new experience for most of the mediators. For a while, they may be unsure of how well they handled conflict situations. For this reason we recommend that for the first two weeks the mediators are on duty, they check-in with the coordinator at the end of their duty period, in order to briefly report on any mediations they have facilitated.



## STEP 6

MAINTENANCE — DEBRIEFING,  
EVALUATION, AND IMPROVEMENTS**Regular Meetings**

Ongoing support for the mediators, both practical and emotional is vital. The Cool Schools Coordinator needs to meet regularly with the mediators in order to discuss successes and problems, provide further skills training and ongoing support. It is recommended that in order to value your team of mediators and the work they do, these support meetings need to be weekly during school time e.g. 12pm on a Friday. All students in the school peer mediation team need to be present.

Some pupils find it easier to verbalise their thoughts on how well the programme has been going, while others find it easier to put them in writing. Using a mixture of approaches will ensure a wider response. A sample evaluation form for written evaluation has been included (Mediator's Evaluation Form).

Being a mediator can be exhilarating, especially when one concludes a successful mediation. However, it can also be boring (if one is often on duty when there are no disputes), frightening (if one is presented with angry or aggressive disputants) and depressing (if one fails to successfully mediate a conflict). Boundaries should be set about the types of disputes mediators deal with. At primary school they would mediate friendship disputes, teasing, name calling, taking turns, games etc. Physical violence, serious bullying, vandalism and anything that happens outside school are the responsibility of the teachers. If mediators are uncertain whether they should mediate a dispute (i.e. not feeling safe) they should refer the disputants to a duty teacher.

Support involves encouragement and praise for the valuable work they are doing. It also involves providing the mediators with opportunities to share their feelings about their experiences of being mediators. Mediators need to be trained in the importance of maintaining confidentiality. In the debriefing sessions they can discuss problems but not student's names. If a person is causing concern they can discuss that in private with the Cool Schools Coordinator. A list can be formed of students who make mediations difficult. These students do not have the privilege of using peer mediators to help with their disputes. They must go to a teacher for assistance.

**Mediation Agreement Form**

Mediators should complete a Mediation Agreement Form for the mediations they do and pass these on to the Cool Schools Coordinator at the end of their duty. This will provide valuable data on types of disputes mediated, solutions reached by students and the success rate achieved. This information can also be shared at staff meetings especially if there are areas of concern.

**Mediator Evaluation Form**

The Mediator Evaluation Form can be used by the Coordinator to determine which skills the mediators need to improve. Information gained from these forms can be discussed at the weekly Mediators Meeting.

**Teacher Evaluation**

Seeking periodic evaluations of the programme from teachers will also help to improve the programme, and to evaluate the success of the programme in the school. If you would like more sample ideas of evaluations contact the Cool Schools Regional Trainer or check out the Coordinator's Kit.

**School Support and Recognition**

As the programme becomes a normal part of the school culture it will be important to maintain the energy and enthusiasm of the mediators, and to affirm the contribution they are making to the school environment. Each school needs to show that the mediation programme is valued. The mediators' job should have prestige because these students are providing valuable leadership and giving service to others. When training is completed they should be awarded certificates in assembly. Set criteria such as performing a certain number of mediations and committed service on the job to earn their mediation ID badge and their Graduation Certificate (refer to Coordinator's Kit for certificate templates). Other ways of giving a high profile to the mediators is for them to introduce a virtue of the week in assembly and give awards, certificates or mediator stickers for those children showing that virtue e.g. cooperation in the playground. More ideas compatible with the role of 'giving service' can be found in Additional Jobs or Activities for Mediators.

## STEP 6: MAINTENANCE—DEBRIEFING, VALUATION, AND IMPROVEMENTS

*(continued)*

### Support from The Peace Foundation

The Peace Foundation will assist, wherever it can, with the ongoing maintenance and improvement of your Cool Schools programme. Often schools come back for full training when staff changes and Cool Schools Regional Trainers will revisit schools spending time with the coordinator, an afternoon with the student mediators and an hour with the staff to update them on new ideas and resources. Network meetings are organised by the trainers in regions throughout New Zealand so that Cool School Coordinators can share successes, problems and innovations together.

### Cool Schools Resources

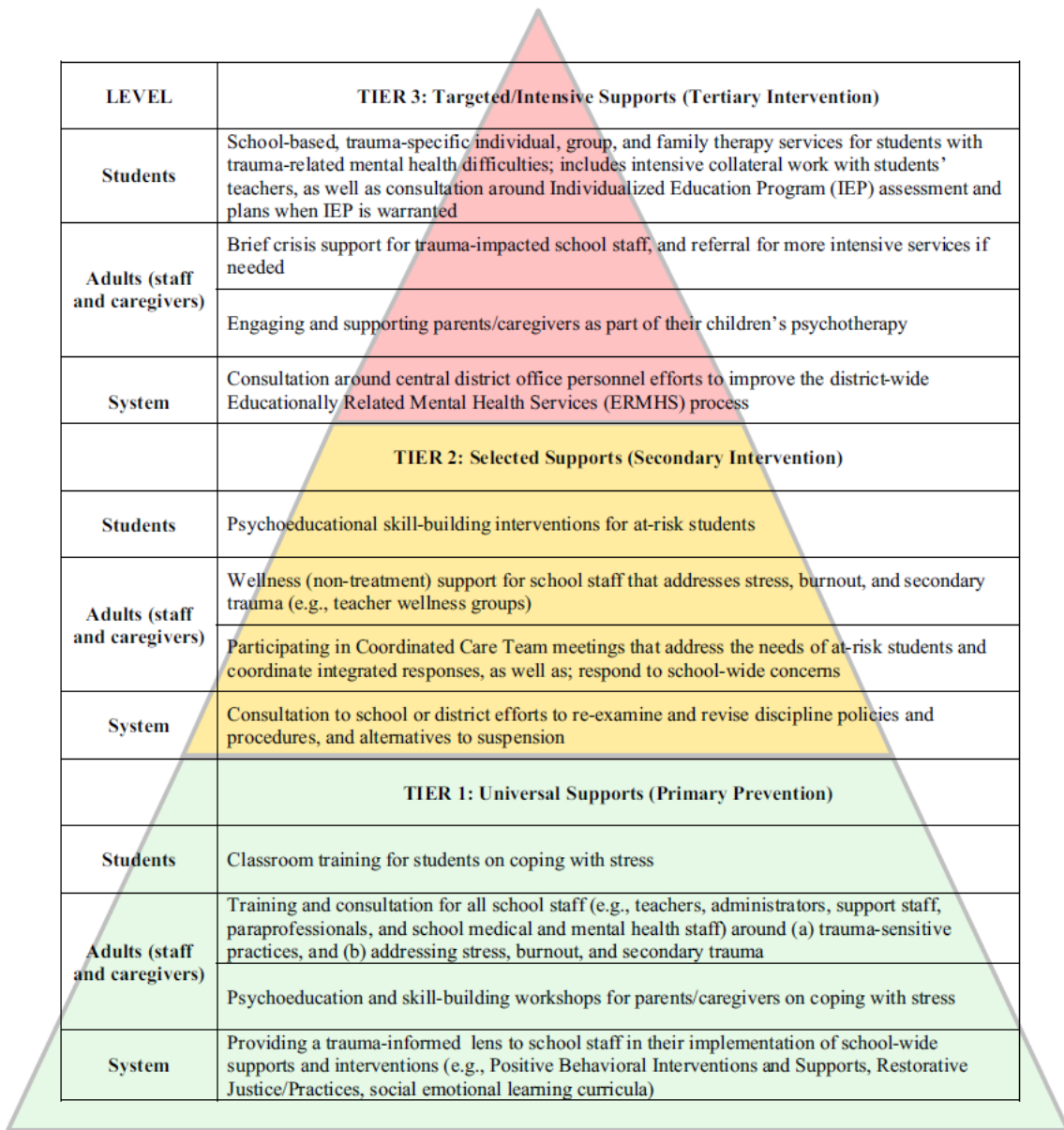
At the time of printing, the Cool Schools resources available from the Peace Foundation are:

- Cool Schools Training DVD—Primary/Intermediate
- Cool Schools Primary/Intermediate Manual
- Coordinator's Kit—Primary/Intermediate
- Coordinator's badge
- Cool Schools Mediator Workbook
- Uniform—vests and badges for duty mediators.
- Cool Schools Signage
- Variety of posters

### Additional Jobs or Activities for Mediators

- **A Friendship Seat**—Students sit on a seat when they are keen to make new friends. Mediators assist them to meet new people. The Friendship Seat can also be a casual drop in spot for anyone to come and sit and chat with others. Mediators can be responsible for the creation of a garden around the seat and also for the design of the seat itself. They monitor this area when they are on duty.
- **Looking for positive behaviour in the playground** i.e. giving a mediator's sticker for 'on the spot' behaviour. A student wearing an 'I made a mediator happy today' sticker will generate interest from their peers, teachers and their parents. This will further affirm their great behaviour and they will be feeling 10 metres tall by the end of the day!
- **Training new mediators**—Experienced mediators pair up with new mediators (apprentice mediators) and teach them on the job. They can support and provide role modelling during the apprenticeship. A good time for this mentoring is during term four when the new school team for the following year is being decided upon.
- **Helping with wet day lunch hours** (in-class mediation).
- **Mediator's Certificate**—Mediators can also be looking for a person to award their Mediators Certificate to at the end of their duty. The information for this certificate needs to be written on The Mediators Certificate Application Form (refer to Coordinator's Kit) on their clipboard. These certificates are given out in assembly by the mediators. When thinking about who should receive a Mediators Certificate, peer mediators on duty can decide on a 'virtue of the week/fortnight/term' to focus their spotting of positive behaviour and attitude in the playground. This award giving encourages responsibility and helps to raise the profile of the peer mediators with other students. It also provides the mediators with a pleasurable activity to help make the duty interesting.
- **Helping initiate games with junior students.** Directing PAL activities etc.
- **Plan and organise the annual Peace Week** (term three) selection of daily activities. Mediators can be responsible for the preparation and facilitation of Peace Week classroom activities at their school each year. Refer to the Notices section of the Cool Schools Newsletter for details on Peace Week.
- **Develop an identity for mediators within the school** i.e. mediation sign, posters and brochures and regular updates on school website etc.

Appendix B: Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS) tiered intervention plan





Appendix C: Oakland Unified School District steps to creating a Restorative School



## Appendix D: Portrait of a Culturally Responsive School System by The Leadership Academy



This **Portrait of a Culturally Responsive School System** offers a roadmap for intentionally building school systems that ensure children of every race, ethnicity, language or other characteristics of their identity, have what they need to achieve academic, social, and emotional success. This Portrait offers a broadened definition and updated expectations of school in these times, encouraging system leaders to push beyond physical walls, and traditional seat time, school zones, and standardized exams.

The system described in this guide is designed to consciously disrupt systemic racism and decenter dominant culture. In the words of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, rather than provide the traditional western "banking" education of filling up minds like piggy banks until they are full, the most effective education is one that inspires learners to think critically, inquisitively, and freely. Someone who is educated within a culturally responsive environment is encouraged to reflect on the world they live in and to challenge inequitable structures in ways that will help bring about change.

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