

Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression: Update (2024)



The Toronto District School Board's Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Team is made up of 10 educators: a Centrally Assigned Principal (CAP), a Program Coordinator (PC) and eight K - 12 Equity Learning Coaches (Coach). The team reports to the System Superintendent of Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti- Oppression and the System Superintendent in turn, reports to the Associate Director of Learning Transformation and Equity. The role and responsibilities of the K-12 Equity Learning Coach within the Toronto District School Board cover a wide array of leadership and support to foster equity, inclusiveness, and anti-racist and anti-oppressive practices throughout the District.

One key aspect of the K-12 Equity Learning Coach's responsibility involves providing leadership in developing and implementing programs that promote equity and inclusiveness. This includes developing professional learning opportunities focused on equity and anti-oppression and aligning the learning with school goals and the District's Multi-Year Strategic Plan.

EQUITY REFERRAL PROCESS

A vital component of the work of the Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Department stems from the Equity Referral Process. Equity Referrals are a mechanism by which schools can seek support in noticing, naming, and combatting instances of hate, racism, and oppressive practices in schools. Schools can obtain support from the Equity Team and/or the Center of Excellence for Black Student Achievement.

The referral is entered through the Equity Referral Form. To date, ninety-eight referrals have been submitted through the referral process.

Depending on the school's needs, Equity Coaches work in partnership with other departments or community agencies, such as the TDSB Gender and Sexual Diversity Team and Professional Support Services.

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS IN EQUITY REFERRAL SCHOOLS

Coaches engage with referral schools in many ways. Some examples are:

FOCUS GROUPS

To ensure meaningful data for school improvement, Gr 7 and 8 students participated in focus groups to provide an opportunity to amplify student voices and address issues of racism, bias, and hate. Groups of 4 to 6 students were identified from each Grades 7 and 8 class to participate in small group discussions. The Focus Group addressed the following themes:

1. Characteristics of engaging classroom experiences.
2. Barriers to students' full engagement in schools.
3. Suggestions for Next Steps to improve school culture.

Student leaders presented the outcomes to school staff with the intent on using the data to inform school improvement.

DEVELOPING RESPONSIVE LITERACY CURRICULUM

Staff engaged in Gholdy Muhammad's framework for creating literacy lesson plans with culturally relevant and responsive books. This framework, which looks at student identity, skills, intellect, criticality, and joy, enhances students' understanding of the material and fosters a sense of belonging and achievement for the student, which aligns with the TDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan. Professional learning was deeply rooted in acknowledging and celebrating diverse identities and experiences. Staff focussed on understanding the importance of this approach and recognized that historically responsive literacy could serve as a powerful tool for affirming the cultural backgrounds of all students while centering student joy.

Actions included:

- Utilization of the TDSB toolkit to select equitable, culturally relevant, and responsive texts.
- Co-planning lessons with staff
- Facilitating professional learning sessions
- Creating rich and transformative lesson plans to enhance literacy skills

2-PART PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SERIES TO COMBAT HATE AND RACISM THROUGH THE REFERRAL PROCESS

As each referral is reviewed, schools presenting a common need are invited to attend a 2-part series addressing that topic. In 2023/2024, three themes were addressed in this model: Addressing Antisemitism, Addressing Islamophobia and Leading the Work through Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy. Schools are invited to send one school administrator and a lead teacher to the professional learning sessions. The session aims to provide foundational learning for school leads on the topic and develop a roadmap for continued professional learning in their schools. This could include school-wide professional learning, curation of resources, community partnerships, etc.

Over 50 schools were invited to participate in these two-part professional learning sessions. Over 100 staff registered for the learning and returned to schools with roadmaps for continued school improvement.

MODEL SCHOOLS FOR INNER CITY SCHOOLS / CULTURALLY RELEVANT AND RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY INITIATIVE (MSIC/CRRP)

A second key component of the role of the Equity Coaches is working very closely with the school administrator and Equity Team of eight Model Schools for Inner City schools. This initiative aims to ground the school's improvement process through the lens of Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy and on the five essential components of Model Schools for Inner Cities:

1. Innovative teaching and learning practices.
2. Providing support services to meet the social, emotional and physical well-being of students.
3. Establishing schools as the heart of the community.
4. Researching, reviewing, and evaluating students and programs.
5. An ongoing commitment to share successful practice.

The goals of Model Schools are to achieve and sustain equity through achieving fairness and ensuring the lives and realities of students are reflected and affirmed. Inclusivity is at the heart of maintaining high expectations.

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS IN THE MSIC/CRRP INITIATIVE

Coaches engage with MSIC/CRRP schools in many ways. Some examples are:

PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITY EDUCATORS

Grade 4 and 5 students partnered with an author to create health and wellness plans. It allowed many students to experience and see representation in a field where diverse voices are not always highlighted, heard or seen.

In this opportunity, educators and students identified the meaning of mental health and wellness and why their mental health and wellness were necessary. They also explored different strategies to determine which worked best for them in managing their feelings and overall wellness. For example, students explored the cultural roots of many wellness practices, particularly those tied to various countries on the continent of Africa.

SYSTEM WORK TO COMBAT HATE AND RACISM

Much of the work of the Equity Team to combat hate and racism is intricately embedded within the Referral and MSIC/CRRP initiatives. These could take the form of school-wide professional learning sessions about manifestations of a specific form of racism, the co-development of lesson ideas, the co-curation of resources using the Equity Tool Kit, the co-development of surveys for parents and caregivers and the running of lunchtime reading programs, to identify a few. Within each, the team members co-develop unique action plans that focus on the school's needs.

Outside of the Referral or MSIC/CRRP Initiative, the Equity Team works collaboratively with the Center of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, other central Departments, and community service providers to facilitate system-wide professional learning to address racism and hate in all its forms.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND INITIATIVES

Appendix B illustrates the diverse system-wide professional learning that directly addresses combating hate and racism.

TEACHERS LEADING AND LEARNING (TLL) MODLET

A TLL modlet is a collaborative and facilitated e-learning experience for beginning teachers and mentors. It involves 8-10 hours of learning over a 4-week period. Here are some of the Modlets available to beginning teachers.

Modlet	Description
Creating Caring and Culturally Relevant Classrooms	This modlet is designed to provide teachers with the opportunity to make connections from their classroom experiences to the big ideas of a caring and culturally relevant classroom, creating physical space for optimal learning, and how to foster a reciprocal relationship with home/parents-caregivers to enhance students' holistic wellbeing.
Critical Theories in Education: Implications for Practice	This modlet is designed to support educators as they become familiar with critical educational theories and pedagogies. Educators can create personal and professional learning goals, familiarize and deepen their understanding of critical theories and pedagogies in education, develop initial strategies for instruction and leadership, and construct an inquiry plan to help foster optimal learning conditions for students. Each section of this modlet includes approaches that scholars and practitioners have identified as central to ensuring all students' academic success, health, and well-being, notably those from marginalized groups.

8-PART PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SERIES TO COMBAT HATE AND RACISM

In addition to the 2-part series, which is referral-based, the Equity, Anti-Racism, and Anti-Oppression Department also leads 8-part synchronous and asynchronous modlets to address different forms of hate and racism. The three 8-part modlets presented during the Winter months were Addressing Anti-Asian Racism, Understanding Islam and Muslim Cultures and Understanding Judaism and Jewish Cultures. The modlets begin from a place of joy and belonging. It is imperative to combat hate and racism with brilliance and excellence. These eight-part modlets allow participants to learn more about cultures, people, and histories. They also cover manifestations of hate and racism and identify ways to combat them. The modlets will be reviewed and revised to meet current staff needs as part of the Team's regular practice.

NEW MODLETS TO COMBAT HATE AND RACISM

In the Summer of 2024, a writing team will develop the Affirming 2SLGBTQIAP+ modlet to provide TDSB staff with background knowledge, learning experiences, and resources to support 2SLGBTQIAP+ students in the system and ways to combat hate.

STUDENT WELLNESS, WELL-BEING, AND ACTION

A vital component of the TDSB's Combatting Hate and Racism Strategy is the need to support students develop the tools to intervene. Throughout the 23/24 school year, the Equity Team has held staff and student affinity spaces. These opportunities provided staff and students with a safe and brave space to discuss wellness, well-being, and coping strategies. The Equity Team partnered with Professional Support Services to ensure students engaging in discussions of experiences of hate and racism were supported as they shared with their peers. The afternoon sessions of these affinity spaces saw community partners engage in identity-affirming presentations about culture, language, and opportunities.

In the Spring of 2024, over 1000 Gr 6 - 12 students from through the TDSB representing all four Learning Centres participated in the virtual and in-person EnVision Conference. The EnVision Conference is an annual gathering of 2SLGBTQIAP+ students, staff, and their allies. It aims to honour and celebrate 2SLGBTQIAP+ communities and discuss issues faced across Ontario in addressing homophobia and transphobia.