

TDSB HERITAGE MONTHS AND DAYS OF SIGNIFICANCE

Overview

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) recognizes the educational value of celebrating the many significance observances that are represented within its classrooms and communities (including various languages, histories, religions, regions, social causes, sexual orientation and gender identity). The two main objectives of recognizing significant observances are:

- *Teaching and Learning:* to support student learning, well-being and the development of equitable, inclusive learning environments by creating enriched opportunities for both students and teachers to build awareness, knowledge and understanding of the heritage, histories, achievements and contributions of the various cultures and groups that make up the diverse TDSB community; and
- *Recognition and Celebration:* to support the diverse TDSB community by recognizing, celebrating and honouring those occasions which hold unique cultural significance for them.

There are two distinct but related activities used by the Board to celebrate and embrace diversity of cultures and to promote awareness:

- designating heritage/history months, also referred to as “heritage months”; and
- designating days of significance.

Activities associated with the various heritage months and days of significance designations is an effective way to promote student engagement and learning through inclusive and diverse curriculums. The Board recognizes and celebrates the diversity of its student population in many ways over the course of the school year, under the guidance of the Board’s Equity Policy (P037), which calls for an anti-racist, anti-colonial equitable lens to be applied to classroom teaching so that multiple narratives, histories and traditional customs are recognized and engaged with culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy all year long.

Heritage Months and Days of Significance Designations

Heritage months designations are allotted time (typically a calendar month) to mark particular religious, historical or cultural occasions of special significance to the diverse TDSB community. Many of the designations are similar to Proclamations issued by the Province and its statutes, and most are celebrated concurrently. Designations are funded and resourced by the Board to provide educational opportunities for students to learn more about the history, heritages, cultures, and achievements of the Board’s many diverse communities and to bring awareness towards groups that have been systematically marginalized and/or excluded. There are currently seventeen (17) annual heritage months recognized, resourced, and/or funded by the Board (see Appendix D to the Report).

Heritage month designations are brought forward through Trustee motion and voted on by the Board of Trustees for approval. Once approved, designations are formally recognized and communicated system-wide. A volunteer committee is established and \$2500 is allocated to the committee to spend towards planning events related to a particular heritage month on central and/or school levels. The committee is supported by TDSB staff and consist of volunteers from the TDSB community. Additional funding can also be generated (through fundraising) to cover related outreach activities, including student transportation, school space permits, fees, student forums, guest speakers and refreshments.

Days of Significance are TDSB designated period of time (usually days, but may include weeks or months) that mark particular religious, historical, or social occasion of special cultural significance. The Board's Days of Significance Calendar ("the Calendar") identifies secular and creed-based observances, significant events, celebrations and public holidays. The Calendar is based on multiple sources and is generally consistent with designations and observances of the City of Toronto, the Government of Ontario, the Government of Canada, and the United Nations. The Calendar is updated by the Employment Equity Office at the TDSB.

The Days of Significance can be added to the Calendar by anyone as requested (e.g. trustee, staff, student, public) pending approval by the Employment Equity Office at the TDSB. The Calendar was developed as a resource to support central and school staff in planning educational or other curriculum related activities including planning educational events, tests, exams, scheduling meetings of the Board of Trustees and its committees, planning public engagement activities and conducting public consultations. The current practice is that staff are using the Calendar information at their discretion. The Calendar is also used as a reference material for processing employees' requests for accommodation. However, accommodation requests are determined on an individual case by case basis subject to multiple criteria outlined in the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and applicable Board's policies and procedures. The Calendar is updated regularly and changes are made by staff throughout the year.

It is important to note, Days of Significance on the Calendar are not funded nor resourced by the Board. However, certain Days of Significance are chosen to be recognized by specific departments (e.g. orange shirt day – Human Rights and Indigenous Education Department) and/or locally at schools, in which case funding and resources are provided on an ad-hoc basis through individual department or school budgets.

Staff and Trustee Involvement

Committee membership is made up of interested individuals, including staff, students, trustees, and community members. Their mandate includes the following:

- a) Plan educational opportunities related to their heritage/history for our students, staff and the TDSB community in order to learn about their traditions, cultures, the richness of

diversity; and how each heritage/history contributes to the vibrant society that we currently live in;

- b) Enrich the curriculum currently available to teaching staff in both panels by sharing available resources that are available from TDSB Professional Library;
- c) Provide opportunities to learn about the culture through daily quotes and facts that may be shared through social media, and made available to school administrators to include through daily announcements at their schools; and
- d) Communicate through the public and internal websites messages on the heritage/history month being recognized and Trustees speak to the heritage/history publically at a regular board meeting.

In order to realize the above, the following staff members work in collaboration to execute decisions made by the volunteer planning committee:

Senior Team Member

- Provides guidance and direction to the volunteer planning committee – i.e. lead a discussion on how best the TDSB can recognize the heritage during the designated month; facilitate which activities will be organized within the framework of available funds; approve communication shared with community members.
- Respond to Trustee(s) inquiries related to heritage months.

Service Coordinator

- Works closely with the senior team member and committee members by sharing relevant information that's needed to execute an event or organize an educational opportunity for our students, staff and community members. This includes writing and sharing the communication through Trustee Weekly Update, Direct Line, and System Leaders' Weekly Update, booking of permits and contacting schools, guest speakers or organizations directly.
- Arranges to have selected poster designs printed for system-wide distribution and framed for official unveiling at events.
- Prepares programs for events (launches), speaking notes for the student MCs and arranges media technical support as required.
- Ensures that heritage month communication is written and forwarded to Communication staff for posting to public and internal website.
- Works closely with communication staff Web Team to post and maintain the Heritage/History Month internal website and the Creative Team to create programs, posters, graphics TV/Monitor, banners, etc. as required by individual heritage month planning committees.
- Maintain ongoing inclusive communication with all volunteer community members by creating a google base document, share summary notes and prepare agendas for meetings.
- Process and maintaining the budget expenditures and donations received for each heritage month.

Communication Staff

- Prepares speaking notes for Trustee recognizing the heritage at the Regular Board Meetings.
- Prepares speaking notes for the Chair and Director attending the heritage launches should one be organized.
- Reviews quotes/facts on the heritage prior to it be posted to review if any controversial materials is included.
- Reviews media releases prepared by Service Coordinator/committee members before submitting to media outlets.
- Web Team posts material to internal website Heritage/History Month
- Web Team assists at events with media support requirements.
- Creative Services prepares a heritage graphic (could be from a student submission) for the TV/Monitor at 5050 to display for the month being recognized.
- Creative Services prepares the poster design resulting from a student contest for printing.
- Creative Services prepares programs for events as required.

TDSB Professional Library

- Staff from the TDSB Professional Library compiles information (resources, books, videos) on each heritage that teachers may use in their classrooms.

Challenges

Currently, the TDSB has no policies or procedures guiding heritage months and days of significance designations. More specifically, there is an absence of clearly defined expectations and processes when it comes to recognizing, communicating, and allocating resources/funding related to days of significance designations. Moreover, some of the months within the school year share multiple heritage month designations; where as some heritage month designations are given their own individual month of recognition.

Lastly, issues of inequity also persists, as certain heritage month and days of significance designations are recognized, resourced, and/or funded by the Board while many other designations are not recognized due to the lack of support for and from local school communities. This causes many of the Boards diverse but underserved communities to continue to be marginalized and excluded in the education system related to recognizing their significant observances. This practice also does not account for the Board's Equity Policy which calls for an anti-racist and anti-colonial equitable lens to be applied to all student engagement activities and classroom teachings.