Update on the Implementation of the MYSP (Multi-Year Strategic Action Plans) - Equity, Anti-Racism & Anti-Oppression 2019-20 including Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement

To: Program and School Services Committee

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Strategic Directions

- Transform Student Learning
- Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students
- Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being

Recommendation

It is recommended that the *Update on the Implementation of the MYSP (Multi-Year Strategic Action Plans) - Equity, Anti-Racism & Anti-Oppression 2019-20 including Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement Report* be received for information.

Context

On March 14th, the Ministry of Education officially closed Ontario schools for a three-week period and then reopened as a 100% remote learning system. On May 25th George Floyd was murdered by police in Minneapolis. This event triggered an international struggle over race and anti-Black racism that along with the pandemic influenced short- and long-term work on equity and anti-Black racism within the TDSB.

This report summarizes key areas of work that were done in relation to equity as well as core areas that changed or shifted as a result of both the pandemic and the increased energy and focus on addressing anti-Black racism within the TDSB. The TDSB has had a longstanding commitment to equity. The formalization of this commitment over the past four years-- the naming equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression as a priority to the Board in this time-- was coupled by the larger shifts in our society due to the pandemic and the racial tension across North America to create a number of different key initiatives or actions within existing initiatives. The most important of which is the creation of the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement, which will serve as a central hub for promising approaches to addressing anti-Black racism and equity such as:

- Youth Participatory Action Research and emergent school-based policy in addressing school belonging and engagement of Black youth.
- Critical Conscious Practitioner Inquiry- Teacher and student school-based network using forms of practitioner inquiry, team-based collaboration, and pedagogic documentation to build capacity in developing a critical consciousness towards race and racism in society.
- Graduation Coaches for Black student success in secondary schools
- Kindergarten Summer Learning Program
- Equity Competency Development within School Principalship
- Issues of ***scale and knowledge mobilization*** across the system-- pulling on initiative evaluations to broaden and deepen reach of the Centre's work across the TDSB

Throughout the approach to equity supports the same general core purposes:

- setting high expectations, increasing access,
- eliminating barriers, and
- confronting and eliminating patterns of streaming

These have become shared system principles that underscore everything from our teaching practice to relationships to leadership decision-making.

Professional learning is at the core of this work and emphasis has been placed on building the knowledge and cultivating both equitable and critical mindsets that are necessary for more responsive teaching and leadership practice. Meaningful progress will only occur when all school and department staff engage in relevant learning in equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression and are held accountable for addressing discrimination and the removal of structural barriers that contribute to unequal outcomes and marginalization.

Each school is on a continuum related to implementing this practice throughout their community. Some schools are much further along in their understanding, effort and ability to make changes and embed these principles in their daily work.

One area where we as a system have made progress is using more respectful language related to equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression. Words matter and changes such as this play a significant role in the evolution of how we think, act and support. We have also seen progress in the increased awareness of the role that identity and lived experiences play in the classroom and are seeing positive changes in both staff and students as a result.

This work, as always, is complex, challenging and intense. It is not easy to address long-standing systems and beliefs and while there has been some resistance and opposition to challenging the status quo, we remain committed, persistent, optimistic and proud of the work that has been accomplished over the past year related to equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression in the TDSB.

Action Plan and Associated Timeline

Evidence of our commitment to equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression can be found throughout the system in alignment with the Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP). The Multi-Year Strategic Plan Action Plans -- specifically *Leadership Development in Equity and Anti-Oppression* and *Toward Excellence in the Education of Black Students:*

Transforming Learning, Achievement and Well-Being -- have provided direction and guidance for the intentional work of equity leaders to transform student learning and create a culture of staff and student well-being.

This report is a snapshot of the progress related to the MYSP Action Plans in three key areas:

- Leadership, School Improvement and Professional Learning in Equity
- Student Voice
- Black Student Success and Excellence Initiative

Multi-Year Strategic Plan

Transform Excellence in Education of Black Students

Professional Development (Black Student Success and Excellence Initiative)

In collaboration with the Anti-Racism Directorate and the TDSB Research Department, the Black Student Success and Excellence initiative focuses on improving the achievement of self-identifying Black students across the system. This professional learning and student engagement initiative engages secondary schools and their elementary feeder schools serving high populations of Black students.

In October 2019, 17 schools with a multi-disciplinary team of educators gathered to build their understanding of key themes within the literature supporting successful educational outcomes for Black students. After an examination of the preliminary findings from the first year of its implementation, school teams reviewed and began the process to design their site-specific work plans. Key components of these work plans included professional learning and pedagogy, student leadership, and parent/community engagement. Through a collaborative inquiry process, school teams deepened their capacity around identity-affirming pedagogical practices to advance greater educational outcomes for Black students. With support from community partnerships and central staff members connected to the identified schools, educators engaged in strategies to establish the necessary conditions to build agency and leadership within students, along with exploring opportunities to leverage community and caregiver relationships to promote the success and excellence of Black students.

As the year progressed, which included labour disruptions along with the COVID-19 pandemic, schools experienced varying levels of success in executing their implementation plans.

Early Years Mobilization Strategy

In collaboration with the Early Years Department, Early Reading Coaches engaged in professional learning to broaden their understanding of anti-bias education. As part of the MYSP goal to improve the overall experience of Black students in the Early Years specifically focusing on entry experiences and academic achievement in literacy and numeracy, Early Reading Coaches examined problems of practice within their identified schools of service. Through the deconstruction of these areas of need, the anti-bias framework served as a tool to lead into critical consciousness practitioner inquiries. These inquiries further supported the work of Early Reading Coaches with educators in designing and developing classroom learning opportunities that deepened children's

positive racial identity, and conditions where families saw themselves as active contributors within the school community.

During the remote learning environment, this partnership further developed into the co-construction of offline learning packages.

2020 Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten to Grade 2 Summer Learning Program

In collaboration with the Early Years Department and Model Schools for Inner Cities Schools (MSIC), a new summer learning experience for pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and grade 2 students was offered. Over 300 students ages 3 to 7 participated in the remote Journey to Success Early Years Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten Summer Learning Program across ten TDSB sites. Eight of these sites were MSIC schools. Journey to Success connects play and learning to children's identity and interests, while affirming families and their communities as partners within the learning journey. This summer learning experience focused on embedding strong literacy and numeracy practices for student development through Africentric and Culturally Relevant and Responsive frameworks.

A special component of this remote learning program was a resource package that each participating family received centred around their child(ren)'s unique lived experiences, identity and culture. This resource package included a variety of picture books and materials to support literacy and numeracy development through play and inquiry. Alongside the curricular experiences, Journey to Success students and families had the opportunity to engage in rich and relevant learning with community-based arts educators. Each site participated in virtual African Drumming, Storytelling, Visual Arts and Reggaecise sessions where children were able to extend their understanding of self and explore methods of creative expression. Throughout the summer learning, capacity-building sessions were provided to educators to deepen their understanding of Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP), principles of Africentricity, teaching and learning using online platforms, and establishing responsive relationships through remote learning environments.

Transform Student Learning

Equity, Anti-Oppression, Anti-Racism Remote Learning Opportunities

Toronto District School Board is committed to providing students rich and relevant learning experiences. To further support this endeavour, educators participated in collaborative learning opportunities that elicit critical reflection and practice when engaging students in remote learning. In June 2020, educators continued to participate in a number of interdisciplinary learning experiences to further ground their pedagogy in Equity and Anti-Oppression. These learning experiences brought educators together to deepen their curricular understanding, practice, and leadership from a culturally relevant and responsive stance within a remote learning environment. A menu of professional learning opportunities for classroom-based educators, centrally assigned educators and educators interested in summer learning were offered. Some examples of these professional learning experiences included: Introduction to Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Equitable and Inclusive Teaching and Learning Practice (Part 1 and Part 2) and Toolkit for Equity and Culturally Relevant and Responsive Resources.

In partnership with the English/Literacy, French As a Second Language and Mathematics central departments, asynchronous learning opportunities were also provided through video vignettes. These vignettes examined strategies to ensure every student has equitable access to learning experiences that are responsive to the current remote learning conditions and reflective of their identities and lived experiences.

Non-Digital Learning Packages

School communities were impacted in many different ways by the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures. In order to support many families across the TDSB that were affected by virtual schools and programming, non-digital learning packages were developed and provided to over 20,000 families in need.

In collaboration with various central departments, offline learning packages for students in kindergarten to grade 8 were developed, reviewed and delivered to students' homes. The learning materials were designed for students who were not able or chose not to participate in online learning. The package contained approximately 4 weeks worth of learning tasks based on curriculum and expectations from the Ministry of Education. The resources helped support students and families stay connected and engaged during those exceptional times.

Critical Reviews of System Resources

The pandemic required the system to ensure educators had equitable access to a plethora of virtual resources to support teaching and learning. As such, the Equity, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression team, in collaboration with various central departments, engaged in the review process of learning resources and well-being experiences. These critical reviews supported the development of a deeper understanding of how to challenge the conditions that create inequities within diverse school communities.

To further support educators in developing their critical consciousness when selecting resources and planning for student learning experiences, Toolkits for selecting Equitable and Culturally Relevant and Responsive resources were created. With the aim to promote student success, this framework supported the development and selection of learning, instructional and well-being resources from an equitable and culturally relevant and responsive stance. All of the toolkits were applicable for K-12.

Equity Leadership

Equity as a Leadership Competency for New Vice Principals & Principals and Aspiring Leaders

Leaders at all levels must possess equity as a foundational leadership competency in order to successfully implement TDSB's Equity Policy. Professional development opportunities for new teachers, Vice Principals and Principals identified the capabilities and skills of leaders who are able to effectively promote and sustain equitable learning and working environments.

New Teacher Induction Program Orientation

In November 2019, over 150 newly contracted elementary and secondary teachers attended the New Teacher Orientation. Throughout the day, beginning teachers had the

opportunity to explore culturally relevant texts and engage in rich conversations in a wide variety of areas.

In partnership with the Teachers Leading and Learning Department, the Equity, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression team supported beginning teachers in deepening their understanding of equitable leadership within the TDSB. This professional development opportunity enabled new teachers to explore and develop strategies to embed equitable practices within their instructional programming.

Professional Development for System Leaders

In collaboration with the equity consultancy firm KOJO Institute, consultant Kike Ojo Thompson lead a series of four workshops on racism and anti-Black racism for Vice-Principals, Principals and Superintendents. Upon completion of the series, participants were presented with a certificate to acknowledge their commitment to this important learning. This comprehensive professional development training will be offered during three separate times in this school year: October, January and April

Beginning Teacher Summer Institute 2020

Toronto District School Board is committed to providing new teachers with professional learning experiences and ongoing mentorship. In support of these goals, beginning teachers and their mentors participated in collaborative sessions aimed at deepening their practice around establishing inclusive learning settings with high expectations for all students. In August 2019, over 400 beginning teachers and their mentors participated in the Beginning Teacher Summer Institute 2020 - *Remixing Pedagogies and Relationships*. This virtual conference provided a selection of sessions that highlight the importance of centring the voices of students and their communities in teaching and learning. Some workshops explored Indigenous ways of knowing, race and racism, critical pedagogies, and anti-bias education. Educators also engaged in a panel conversation with the Urban Indigenous Education Centre, Equity and Human Rights. Participants received complimentary resources to continue their learning.

Equity Referral Form

The Equity, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression Team continued to offer central support to school communities throughout the year. To facilitate the process of connecting with the Team, a referral process was developed to further serve students and families. Once a school completed the referral form, it was then analyzed to identify areas of need. Upon review, coaches within the Equity, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression Team arranged an initial conversation with the school administrator and school team for further planning. The school team might consist of the administrator(s), lead teacher(s) and central team (if applicable). Throughout the school year, over 60 schools completed the referral requesting varied levels of support alongside system requests to engage in professional development.

Equity in Remote Learning Settings

The pandemic required the Equity, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression Team to engage educators in remote professional learning experiences in partnership with the Model

Schools for Inner Cities (MSIC) program, the Equity, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression Team offered over 375 educators professional learning experiences. Some of these professional learning opportunities included:

- Building Relationships and Maintaining High Expectations while working Remotely
- Toolkit for Equity and Culturally Relevant and Responsive Resources
- Deepening our Understanding of Critical Consciousness
- Taking the Neutrality Out of Mathematics Education
- Equitable and Inclusive Teaching Practice

Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships with School Communities

Equity in School Councils

The TDSB is committed to strengthening the processes by which all parents and caregivers have opportunities to contribute to their local school's improvement planning efforts. To support the engagement of parents and caregivers to implement equitable change within school councils, the Equity, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression Team facilitated learning experiences that critically address issues of equity within school councils. Parents and caregivers had an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the skills and behaviours of effective school councils to reimagine the ways in which they operate.

Newcomers Services Podcast

In partnership with the Business Operations department, the Equity, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression Team supported in the review of a mini-podcast series for TDSB families experiencing diverse challenges throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of these series include:

- Observing Ramadan in a Time of Social Distancing
- Daily Life in a Shelter for Refugee Families
- Students Helping Others During Social Distancing

Reading Partnership for Black Parents

The Reading Partnership for Black Parents (RPBP) program at Driftwood P.S. collaborated with Black caregivers and community members to further enhance Black caregivers' knowledge, confidence and leadership in supporting their children's literacy development. At Driftwood P.S., the RPBP program built upon the strengths of children and their caregivers to facilitate literacy learning through play. The program partnered with caregivers who faced institutional oppressions, such as anti-Black racism, employment insecurities, and sexism.

In the RPBP program, Black caregivers established peer-relationships and shared their diverse experiences, skills, and perspectives. Participating caregivers worked with one another and their children to further support their children's literacy development, strengthen culturally relevant knowledge, and enhance their own and their children's wellbeing.

The RPBP program was co-designed with Black caregivers, educators, school administrators, and community partners to ensure that programming was culturally relevant to the Driftwood school community and honoured the leadership of Black caregivers.

Community Parent Engagement Sessions with Dr. Carl James

Dr. Carl James facilitated sessions in select schools entitled, "*How to Navigate the School System for Black Student Success, K-12*" across the Learning Centres. These sessions served as a way to further engage families, community and educators in discussions on improving the experiences and opportunities of Black students. Participating families received York University's resource, *The Engaged Parent: Navigating School Systems for Black Student Success*. This resource supports partnerships between parents of Black children, their teachers and the school system. The bilingual information sheets provide parents of Black children with tips to help ensure their child's success and wellbeing. Co-written by Dr. Carl James and Tana Turner, the information sheets were created in response to ongoing research around the experiences of Black parents and their children in schools across the Greater Toronto Area. Although developed for parents, the information sheets provide school administrators with insights on working with families and community members for Black student success and excellence, as outlined in TDSB's Multi-Year Strategic Plan.

Due to labour and pandemic disruptions, the face-to-face sessions were halted and postponed. School communities continued to have online access to *The Engaged Parent: Navigating School Systems for Black Student Success* resource and in the 2020-21 school year, Dr. James will continue to provide access to this session for the schools that were affected.

Black Community Organization Partnerships

The Multi-Year Strategic Plan addresses the importance of identifying, curating, and co-developing community partnerships to ensure students are able to see themselves reflected and have a voice within the curriculum. Community educators are valuable contributors to this educational process. The Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression Team in partnership with the Educational Partnership Office, hosted two community partnerships events, one in the West and the second in the East. These events were geared towards leveraging the strengths of Black community organizations that offer educational programming. Through these partnerships, the TDSB continues to promote a system culture that provides students with dynamic culturally relevant and responsive learning opportunities that support equity, achievement and well-being.

Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being

Student-led Engagement Initiatives

The TDSB is committed to increasing the influence of students' individual and collective insights on decision-making. To improve engagement, academic achievement, equity, well-being and school climate, the Equity, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression Team in partnership with Student Equity Program Advisors, Gender Based Violence Prevention Team and other central departments, launched Black Brilliance West and EnVision Conferences.

Black Brilliance West is an annual student-led conference that acknowledges and affirms the experiences and achievements, as well as the challenges unique to Black students. This year's theme entitled *"Powerful in Our Own Skin"* run by students at Downsview Secondary School, hosted students from 21 TDSB secondary schools as well as students from Shelbourne Ontario's Upper Grand District School Board and Auburn High in Nova Scotia. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Black Brilliance East Conference was unable to proceed as planned.

Over 500 middle and high school LGBTQI2S+ students and allies across the TDSB came together over two days to connect with one another, celebrate their identities and explore issues LGBTQI2S+ communities are experiencing. With this year's theme being Mental Health and Well-being, students had the opportunity to participate in over 10 different workshops led by community organizations and students that examined gender and sexual diversity, healthy relationships and mental health. Students throughout the day connected with adults in the interfaith panels and had access to a quiet space with support from TDSB social workers.

Black Student Summer Leadership Program

The TDSB has 5 Graduation Coaches for Black students working since March of 2020 in the following 7 Secondary schools across the system: Albert Campbell Collegiate, AY Jackson, Forest Hill CI, Central Technical School, Westview Centennial SS, Kipling CI and Thistletown Collegiate. The Black Student Summer Leadership Program, led by Graduation Coaches for Black Students, was a 7-week research initiative that engaged 31 Black students from 7 TDSB Secondary Schools. In collaboration with the Jean Augustine Chair in Education, Community and Diaspora in the Faculty of Education at York University, this program had 4 key principles: citizenship, agency, activism and mentorship (See Appendix A).

At the heart of the TDSB Black Student Summer Leadership Program was the goal of training students through a Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) framework to develop their competencies as leaders in community-based research projects and agents of social change. Through this youth-centred research model, student voice was amplified and honoured in conversations about schooling experiences and community development. Furthermore, the recommendations from this program have led to two newly designed credit courses focusing on positive racial identity development, taking place from November to June 2021.

Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement

In June 2020, TDSB's trustee's approved funding to create the first K-12 Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement. Advocated by Black community voice, this Centre will be the first of its kind in public education in Canada. It was developed as one of the board's responses to dismantle anti-Black racism and improve the life experiences and educational outcomes for Black students.

Proposed from the Enhancing Equity Task Force, the recommendation of the Centre ties to numerous action plans in the Board's Multi-Year Strategic Plan focussed on specific ways to support Black students.

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement will build on these actions plans and recommendations through its mandate. The Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-

Oppression team will collaborate with the staff at the Centre to support a more coordinated and well-resourced approach through the various initiatives and work generated within the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement.

The mandate of the Centre is to:

- Provide support to Black students in TDSB schools to combat racism, navigate complaint processes, identify barriers to success and access appropriate resources (e.g., scholarships, networking, mentoring)
- Use evidence to highlight promising practices and engage in meaningful research on topics relevant to Black students that are then integrated across schools and at the system level within the TDSB
- Create professional learning in anti-Black racism and collaborate with other staff in facilitating learning in decolonization, Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression & human rights recognizing the similarities and intersections of various forms of oppression
- Identify, develop and facilitate culturally responsive and relevant healing practices for groups of students
- Inform changes to policies and procedures so that all students may benefit from the learning and innovative practices developed by the Centre
- Establish effective mechanisms for monitoring improvement in the achievement of Black students
- Provide annual accountability reports and recommendations to the Board of Trustees and staff
- Support meaningful engagement and advocacy of caregivers for their children in TDSB schools and programs and improve communication to them about Black student success, system navigation and complaint processes; and
- Engage in strategic community partnerships related to education within the annually identified approved budget for this purpose

Update - Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement

The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement has recently appointed the Centrally Assigned Principal, who is working in collaboration with the System Superintendent of Equity, Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression to finalize the site location, staffing and the critical path for the phases for implementation.

Site Location

- Working with Planning department and local feasibility team to explore potential sites for the Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement; currently proposed geographically East of the DVP
- Engaging in discussion with school teams re: location and space within identified sites

Staffing

- Process of hiring the full complement of staff associated with the allotment of 20.5 staff
- Postings and interview timelines created

Phase I Actions

- Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement: Community Conversations

    - Collaborating with Research department to identify and develop focus groups with stakeholders to identify key deliverables of each mandate in Phase I, II and III
    - stakeholders:
        - students
        - staff
        - community educators/agencies
        - academic/researchers

- Development of website and communication materials (e.g., logo)
- Establish new partnerships and maintain on-going partnerships to identify key initiatives that support Black students success, well-being and belonging, including:
    - Parent Engagement - Dr. Carl James
    - Youth Participatory Action Research with York University & TDSB Graduation Coaches for Black Students
    - University partnerships for Black students
- Extend the learning from the Black Student Success and Excellence Initiative's collaborative inquiries to inform actions of the Centre of Excellence for Black Students.

Communications Considerations

BSACAC (Black Student Achievement Community Advisory Committee) and EPCAC (Equity Policy Community Advisory Committee) are updated.

Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

Multi-Year Strategic Plan – Action Plans

Policy P037 – Equity
Policy P031 – Human Rights
Policy P069 – Accessibility
Policy P073 – Respectful Learning and Working Environment
Protecting and Promoting Human Rights and Addressing Discrimination in Schools for students, parents and families
Expected Practices for Understanding, Addressing and Preventing Discrimination brochure for school staff (accessible version)
TDSB Guidelines for the Accommodation of Transgender and Gender Independent Non-Conforming Students and Staff

Appendices

Appendix A: TDSB Black Student Summer Leadership Program 2020

From

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