



Indigenous Land-Based Learning

To: Planning and Priorities Committee

Date: 23 June, 2021

Report No.: 06-21-4135

Strategic Directions

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

Recommendation

It is recommended that the TDSB move towards ensuring that the Indigenous Land-Based Learning Centre at the Boyne River Natural Science School Site begin preparations to serve TDSB students and the wider Indigenous Community supported through the TDSB Urban Indigenous Education Centre, guided by the Elders Council.

Context

Since 2003 the Boyne River Natural Science School site has remained vacant. This site is located on 308.5 acres of the Niagara Escarpment, adjacent to the Bruce Trail and the Boyne River Provincial Park. These lands have been designated by the Province as an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI), and most of the property is classified as *Escarpment Natural* under the *Niagara Escarpment Plan*.

Through the TDSB [Three-Year Capital Budget Plan](#) in 2016, staff identified the site as a key asset to support Indigenous Education in the Board. In 2017, the TDSB announced its original commitment of using the Boyne River site to support Indigenous Land-based Learning (Appendix A) and began work with planners to regain access to the site as it is deemed protected areas of land of significance there are restrictions to land use.

On August 12, 2020 the site gained Royal Assent through a hearing with the Niagara Escarpment Commission to restore the designation of Institutional Use by the TDSB for “Indigenous uses of cultural significance and passive recreation uses.” (Appendix B)

Reopening the Boyne as an Indigenous Land-Based Learning site in the TDSB supports the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action - Actions 62 and 63 which support Indigenous Education and maximizes the use of natural resources available to the TDSB students, staff and the wider community. Action 62 and 63 supports the conditions to support Indigenous student success and well being.

In partnership, the Urban Indigenous Education Centre, with the guidance and support of the Elders Council, Urban Indigenous Community Advisory Committee, and TDSB Outdoor Education department will work to allocate existing resources to fulfill this commitment to reopen the Boyne Natural Science School Site as a Indigenous STEAM Centre.

Action Plan and Associated Timeline

The Boyne is a very large site. It is intended to open the site in phases, beginning with ensuring that the water and septic systems are operational and open the Ecology Centre which will support the use of the site for day visits. It is intended that the existing facility for Indigenous educational programming be inclusive of classroom and Indigenous Land-Based pedagogies.

The Indigenous Land-Based Learning Centre will have a focus on “wholistic” Indigenous health and well-being (physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual). The focus of programming on-site will include professional learning, supporting student success, community engagement, partnerships, curriculum resource development and innovation, research and development and reconciliation through Indigenous perspectives.

To support the expansion of Land-Based Learning through Indigenous ways of knowing and being, staff will be creating resources to support all curriculum areas based on Indigenous Pedagogies, including, but not limited to Indigenous Cultures and Traditions, Indigenous Language Revitalization, Archery, Canoe/Kayak building, Hiking, Maple Syrup programming, Mapping and Orienteering, Medicine Harvesting and Walks, Mountain Biking, Pow Wows and Snow Shoeing.

The initial programming is anticipated to be during the school year from September-June with approximately 1-2 classes at a time (40-60 students).

As funding becomes available, it is anticipated that the full site will be restored to support large groups, for both day and overnight programming.

Resource Implications

The instructional supports for schools will be provided within the existing budget allocation for Indigenous Education and Outdoor Education.

Funding for the initial restoration plan will be joint - \$301,032 will come through the TDSB's implementation of Curriculum and Assessment Implementation Allocation 2021. It is intended that program resources will support:

Health and Physical Education
First Nations, Metis and Inuit Studies
Mathematics
Guidance and Careers

The additional \$415,000 to complete this phase would be accessed through Renewal funding.

Communications Considerations

Trustees' Weekly and System Leaders Bulletin will be used to provide communication to the system as the site is ready to receive students and programming. This is intended to be in the spring of 2022.

Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

- P033 – Excursions PR511 – Excursions
- First Nations, Metis and Inuit Policy
- Framework, 2007 Truth and Reconciliation
- Commission Calls to Action UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Appendices

- **Appendix A:** [Decolonizing Our Schools](#) (Executive Summary)
- **Appendix B:** Decision of the Minister: Respecting Amendment PD 214 18 to the Niagara Escarpment Plan

From

Craig Snider, Associate Director, Business Operations and Service Excellence at Craig.Snider@tdsb.on.ca or at 416-397-3188.

Curtis Ennis, Associate Director, Equity, Well-Being and School Improvement at Curtis.Ennis@tdsb.on.ca or at 416-396-9184.

Maia Puccetti, Executive Officer, Facilities and Planning at Maia.Puccetti@tdsb.on.ca or at 416-393-8780

Jim Spyropoulos, Executive Superintendent, Human Rights and Indigenous Education at Jim.Spyropoulos@tdsb.on.ca or at 416-397-3678.

Tanya Senk, System Superintendent, Indigenous Education at Tanya.Senk@tdsb.on.ca or at 416- 393-9600.

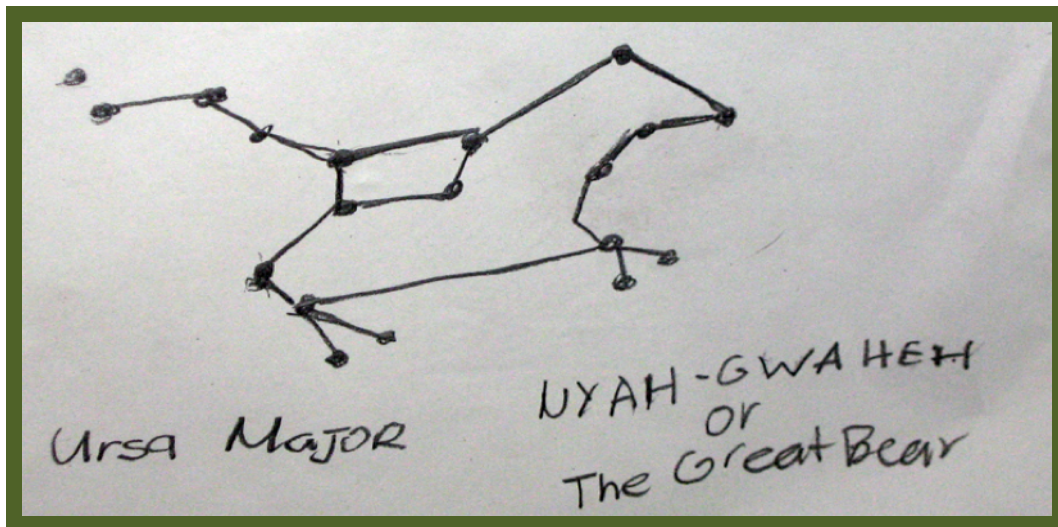
David Hawker-Budlovsky, Centrally Assigned Principal, Outdoor Education at David.Hawker-Budlovsky@tdsb.on.ca or at 416-396-3408.

Appendix A:

Decolonizing Our Schools

Aboriginal Education In The Toronto District School Board

A REPORT ON THE
URBAN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION PILOT PROJECT



Decolonizing Our Schools

Aboriginal Education in the Toronto District School Board

Executive Summary

In this report titled *Decolonizing Our Schools: Aboriginal Education in TDSB* we describe the work of the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project (UAEPP) in the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). Drawing on data gathered between April 2009 and September 2010, we document, evaluate, and provide our analysis of the UAEPP in service of understanding how to accomplish an education worthy of our children and our ancestors in a large, diverse urban context. The report is based on the research findings of the *Talking Stick Project: Aboriginal Education in the TDSB Gathering Stories of Teaching and Learning*.ⁱ It is intended to inform both the UAE Steering Committee and the TDSB about the successes and challenges the Pilot Project faced in accomplishing its goals.

Our research confirms what Aboriginal parents, educators, and students already knew: institutions of formal schooling, including the TDSB, are failing to provide Aboriginal students with the educational environment and experiences they require to achieve success.

Students in urban settings confront particular problems since they may not be recognized as Aboriginal or, if recognized at all, may be expected to have access to and be willing to share cultural knowledge. Furthermore, they may not see themselves represented in the curriculum or the teaching population and are encouraged to attend school in spite of a long, negative, and hurtful relationship between Aboriginal people and schooling.

School Board administrators, teachers, and other Board employees in urban settings also confront particular challenges, such as recognizing Aboriginal student populations, delivering programs when students are frequently dispersed across a range of schools, lacking the requisite knowledge for teaching Aboriginal subject material, and engaging families and communities who may be understandably resistant to formal educational institutions.

ⁱ This report addresses the Implementation Phase of the UAE Pilot Project in the TDSB. Activity that occurred during the planning phase of the project is not included. The staff chart on page 3 of the report includes the names of TDSB staff that were not pilot project staff. The Pilot Project staff and the TDSB Aboriginal Education staff worked in close collaboration to accomplish the goals of the Pilot Project as such it was difficult for the research team to differentiate. Two names are missing from the chart, Jeffery McDonald and Eddy Robinson worked as Consultants on the Pilot Project. In addition Lloyd Mckell Executive Officer, Student and Community Equity, played an integral role in supporting the project.

Research Findings

Our research conducted with over 200 students, parents, teachers, community members, administrators, and other UAEPP stakeholders has generated four key findings.

1. The Board must recognize the importance of understanding and responding to Aboriginal students, youth, and their learning needs.

In this research, parents, teachers, students, community members, and UAEPP staff emphasized that quantitative indicators of success (grades, completion rates) are insufficient indicators of students' experiences within the urban school system and are not necessarily commensurate with Indigenous conceptions of learning. This research found that rejecting a narrow definition of learning premised on the acquisition of and capacity to replicate knowledge and the mastery of skill, in favour of a broader conceptualization of *student well-being* that relies on a complex understanding of what it means to learn, facilitated greater and more meaningful learning opportunities for Aboriginal students.

In particular, as a result of involvement in UAEPP activities, activities which attended to well-being, students in this research began to see school as a place for them, a place where they could not only be Aboriginal, but where they could learn about and feel comfortable in their Aboriginality. This involved creating learning environments and learning experiences for students where they had opportunities to contribute to as well as learn from Aboriginal people's experiences and perspectives.

2. The meaningful and appropriate incorporation of Indigenous issues across the curriculum must be supported by providing in-service professional development for teaching staff.

Teachers reported that the UAEPP provided them with invaluable access to resources, expertise, training, and that their teaching practice, and their students' learning were directly enhanced as a result. Through UAEPP sponsored projects and professional development, there was a significant shift in teachers' understandings of Aboriginal people, history, and culture, the importance of Aboriginal education, and understandings of their roles and responsibilities as teachers and as inheritors of the colonial legacy. However, while most of the teachers interviewed came to be involved with the UAEPP because of their pre-existing commitment to Aboriginal education, many noted that the anxiety and discomfort experienced through the kind of learning opportunities provided challenged their commitments. Thus, the larger project of shifting understandings of Canada's colonial history ensuring that teachers are using the resources appropriately is part of the larger, much longer process of decolonizing and indigenizing. Teachers must be prepared to take up their unique responsibilities and roles, and they must be supported in their attempts to do so.

3. Schools and learning environments must be transformed in order to decolonize and indigenize learning spaces.

The UAEPP worked in collaboration with TDSB staff at the school level to identify useful strategies for creating decolonized and indigenized school environments where Aboriginal students felt safe and supported in exploring their Aboriginality and where non-Aboriginal students had access to Aboriginal

subject material providing opportunities to know themselves in relationship with Aboriginal students. The experience of belonging and respect that Aboriginal students and families have a right to expect is premised on staff attitudes and understanding, as well as the inclusion of Aboriginal experiences and perspectives in the school curriculum. Understandably, the UAEPP staff were most successful in schools where the principals and vice principals were supportive of their presence and took an active interest in understanding the concepts of decolonizing and indigenizing and reflecting them in their schools. In-service activities and resources that prepare school staff members to act in ways respectful of Aboriginal people must be introduced into schools, along with images and materials that emphasize respect for Aboriginal people.

4. Aboriginal Education must be prioritized across the Board, especially by establishing and maintaining internal and external partnerships.

Collaborations with both internal and external partners, including departments, institutions, and agencies, allowed the UAEPP staff to create sustainable change by laying the groundwork for integrating Aboriginal Education across the curriculum. However, while the UAEPP staff was often impressed by the commitment of the non-Aboriginal TDSB community, they were also overwhelmed by the lack of knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal issues and the all too frequent demonstrations of disrespect shown to them as teachers. On the other hand, external partnerships between the UAEPP and community organizations increased linkages between schools, Aboriginal students and families, and Aboriginal agencies resulting in opportunities to bring Aboriginal knowledge and content into schools and to put Aboriginal students and their families in contact with community in the city. This research suggests that positive, respectful, and reciprocal partnerships within the Board and across the community can foster student engagement; provide opportunities for meaningful learning related to students' identities, communities, histories, including the history of colonialism; and expand the development of oral and written communication skills and the capacity for self-expression. However, in order to accomplish comprehensive change, Aboriginal Education must be recognized as a priority by the Board and must be actively supported at all levels.

Recommendations

Emerging from our research with key informants is the recommendation that decolonization and indigenization of the learning environment be recognized as an urgent priority by the Toronto District School Board and be actively supported at all levels. In particular, the experiences of interviewees indicates that attention to Aboriginal student well-being and Aboriginal subject material is required. There needs to be active work toward improving course offerings and creating better, balanced, and fairer representations of Aboriginal people, cultures, and histories by encouraging the integration of Indigenous thought and perspectives across the curriculum and physical learning environments. Supporting collaborative working relationships between the Aboriginal Education Centre and TDSB departments is necessary if comprehensive change is to be accomplished. Sustaining partnerships established between the TDSB and external Aboriginal community agencies and organizations will allow for the integration of Aboriginal people's knowledge, experiences and perspectives.

In what follows, we outline general and specific recommendations arising from this research.

Overarching Recommendations:

- Aboriginal Education must be recognized as a priority by the Board and must be actively supported at all levels.
- Sustained funding is necessary to build the work accomplished by the UAEPP.
- Attention to Aboriginal students' well-being and the meaningful and appropriate incorporation of Aboriginal subject material across the curriculum must be made a priority.
- A comprehensive staff development plan, including the recruitment of Aboriginal educators and staff, is needed for decolonizing and indigenizing teaching practice and content delivery.
- Establishing and maintaining respectful and reciprocal relationships between the TDSB and community organizations are essential for creating a safe teaching, learning, and work environment for Aboriginal staff and community members.

Specific Recommendations

Supporting Aboriginal Student Well-being

- TDSB must adopt an approach to Aboriginal Education that puts Aboriginal student well-being in the center.
- Classroom teachers and school support staff should actively take responsibility for all students' learning rather than waiting for or expecting students to come forward and identify as Aboriginal before receiving support.
- School and Board staff must provide opportunities for Aboriginal students to become leaders and advisors in the education of non-Aboriginal students and the whole school.
- School and Board staff must create multiple opportunities for Aboriginal students to have lessons that include traditional teachings, language instruction, examination of the history of colonialism, and historical and contemporary Aboriginal culture.

Benefits

- Rather than experiencing alienation and marginalization within the school community, Aboriginal students could begin to experience schools as offering a place of belonging for them.
- Students who have access to Aboriginal perspectives and experiences in their out of school lives would then be put in the position of being able to draw from and build on that knowledge.
- Aboriginal students would have opportunities to know themselves as Aboriginal beings and to develop their own ways of expressing their Aboriginality.

Decolonizing and Indigenizing: Teacher Roles and Responsibilities

The TDSB in collaboration with the Ministry of Education as well as other educational institutions and professional bodies must provide teachers with ongoing professional development opportunities that include meaningful discussions about colonization.

- The TDSB must focus resources on improving teacher training, especially related to building a respectful classroom environment where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students are comfortable learning about and discussing the history and legacy of colonialism.
- In collaboration with the Ministry of Education and the TDSB, teachers must work to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum and to develop and offer Native Studies courses in secondary schools.
- Teachers must ensure that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students have access to appropriate resources.
- Teachers must be provided with support to work respectfully and supportively with Aboriginal students.

Decolonizing and Indigenizing: School Responsibilities

- Schools must educate non-Aboriginal students, teachers, and administrators about Aboriginal peoples and cultures, the history of colonialism, and contemporary issues using opportunities like National Aboriginal Day.
- It is the responsibility of each school to provide information about the nation on whose traditional territory their school is built on, as well as the name and location of reserves located in close proximity to their school community.
- Schools must anticipate resistance from non-Aboriginal students and staff, and be provided with the knowledge, resources, and support school staff and administrators need to positively face and deal with resistance.
- Schools must provide in-service education with teacher librarians to support them in providing appropriate Aboriginal resources to students and teachers, including Aboriginal authored texts
- Include Aboriginal art, poetry, and traditional teachings on the walls of the school.
- Schools should consider incorporating Aboriginal approaches to conflict resolution, including the use of restorative justice circles, in collaborative decision-making procedures

Decolonizing and Indigenizing: School Board Roles & Responsibilities

- The Board must require all principals to participate in decolonizing and indigenizing professional development.
- The Board must support Aboriginal community liaisons with the capacity to nurture relationships between TDSB schools and external Aboriginal agencies.
- The Board must respect and value the expertise that the Aboriginal community brings to the classroom through sustaining and strengthening community ties and partnerships.
- It is the responsibility of the Board to practice reciprocity by giving back, recognizing that if Board leadership wants community members to participate in and support change in TDSB schools, then TDSB staff, including senior staff, must support and participate in the activities and initiatives of community agencies.
- The Board must offer and support teachers in acquiring decolonizing and indigenizing teacher development courses.

- The Board must require all departments to demonstrate a plan for integrating Aboriginal Education. Priority should be given to the development and implementation of Native Studies courses in secondary schools.
- The board should set realistic goals to increase the number of Aboriginal educators and staff, especially by recognizing alternative qualifications and by altering hiring policies and practices to support the hiring of Aboriginal people.
- Finally the Board must maintain a centre like the Aboriginal Education Centre, to be the hub of activity related to Aboriginal education.

Appendix B:

Decision of the Minister

Under the *Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act*

Respecting Amendment PD 214 18 to the Niagara Escarpment Plan

WHEREAS pursuant to subsection 6.1(2) of the *Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act*, R.S.O. 1990, Chapter N.2 (the "Act"), the Toronto District School Board made application for an amendment to the Niagara Escarpment Plan to:

Add a special policy provision to Part 1.3 Escarpment Natural Area designation to recognize as a permitted use the institutional use of the Boyne River Outdoor Education Centre located at Lots 4,5 and 6 (east half), Concession 1 and 2.

AND WHEREAS the requirements of subsections 10(1)(a), (b) and (c) of the Act, were carried out pertaining to notification of, and consultation with, each local municipality, county and regional municipality, the public, and an advisory committee appointed under subsection 4(1) of the Act, respecting the proposed amendment;

AND WHEREAS no written objections to the proposed amendment were received by the Niagara Escarpment Commission before the expiration of the time for making comments;

AND WHEREAS pursuant to subsection 10(9) of the Act, the Niagara Escarpment Commission, after giving consideration to comments received under subsection 10(1) of the Act, submitted to me its recommendations on the proposed amendment dated June 20, 2019;

AND WHEREAS I have received and considered the recommendations of the Niagara Escarpment Commission;

THEREFORE, pursuant to subsection 10(11) of the Act, I approve the amendment of the Niagara Escarpment Plan as follows:

The Permitted Uses in Part 1.3.3 (Escarpment Natural Area) is amended by adding the following new section to Part 1.3.3 and renumbering the sections accordingly:

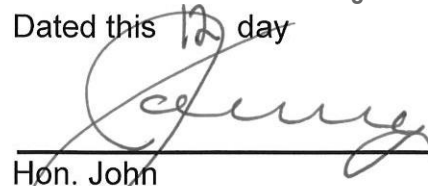
Special Provisions for the subject property at 716231 1st Line East, Mulmur (see Amendment No. PD 214 18 Boyne River Outdoor Education Centre -Toronto District School Board)

Notwithstanding the permitted uses of this section, an institutional use and the related accessory uses, is permitted in the areas of the existing institutional complex.

Additionally, Indigenous uses of cultural significance and passive recreation uses are permitted on the existing lot of record municipally addressed as 716231 1st Line East Township of Mulmur, County of Dufferin. The legal description is Lots 4,5 and 6 (east half), Concession 1 and 2. Any proposals for further expansion of the institutional use in the Escarpment Natural Area, beyond the existing and approved gross floor area of 57,892 sq. ft. on the site in the Escarpment Natural Area designation will require consideration through a Plan amendment application. (see Amendment 214)

of August 2020

Dated this 12 day

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "John Minis", is written over a horizontal line.

Hon. John
Minis