



Caring and Safe Schools: Annual Report 2019-2020

To: Planning and Priorities Committee

Date: 23 June, 2021

Report No.: 06-21-4134

Strategic Directions

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

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Caring and Safe Schools: Annual Report 2019-2020, be received.

Context

Over the past four years in the Toronto District School Board, significant attention has been placed on challenging streaming through a number of key areas including the early years, special education, academic pathways and students discipline processes.

Research shows that streaming contributes to inequitable outcomes for students, and particularly disadvantages specific groups of students – including those who are racialized and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Student discipline processes which impose suspensions and expulsions contribute to streaming.

The total number of suspensions and expulsions in Toronto District School Board decreased for the fourth consecutive year in 2019-20.

2019-20 was an unusual school year: all Ontario public schools, including those in Toronto District School Board (TDSB), were closed to in-person learning beginning March 16, 2020, under an order of the Ontario government due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Teacher-led online learning began on April 6, 2020, with all TDSB schools remaining closed to in-person learning for the rest of the school year.

The school closure contributed to fewer suspensions and expulsions within the Board in 2019-20.

This data is a valuable tool for helping schools foster a positive learning culture and support evidence-based decision making and accountability. Schools should be safe and welcoming spaces where all students feel respected, included and valued in their learning environments. In the Toronto District School Board, we are committed to creating these positive environments and recognize their impact on student success. By directly addressing the role that student discipline plays in a school's overall climate as well as the potential in streaming students towards specific pathways and outcomes, we are making positive changes to the lives of students.

This work, guided by our Multi-Year Strategic Plan, has focused on a number of key actions:

- Identifying trends, patterns and opportunities in past suspension data for improvement;
- Supporting the Caring and Safe Schools team to examine bias, power and privilege as they relate to student discipline process;
- Supporting school administrators in the application of human rights, anti-racism and anti-oppression principles to student discipline;
- Reviewing Caring and Safe Schools practices to ensure consistency with principles of anti-racism and anti-oppression; and
- Providing learning opportunities for more staff to be trained in restorative practices.

School administrators continue to participate in professional learning that examines bias, power and privilege and their connection to student discipline. This learning has encouraged Principals to better understand the lived experiences of each of their students, which has not only led to Principals better exercising their discretion when they have an option to not suspend, but also has helped them identify, confront and remove barriers proactively to create more inclusive and equitable learning cultures.

A positive school environment is the foundation of a culture of trust, high expectations and a sense of belonging. We will continue to emphasize programming that encourages and supports positive behaviour and allows us to intervene early to better engage and support our students.

Two data analyses were conducted for this report, which is attached as Appendix A. In Sections A-C of the report, all suspensions and expulsions for the entire 2019-20 school year are reported and compared to the total numbers for the previous four years. In Sections D and E, the number of suspensions and expulsions from September 1, to March 15, in 2019-20 was compared with those in the same time period for the previous school year. This data set allows for a more specific point of comparison, year-over-year. This date range was selected because of the impact on suspension/expulsion data in light of school closure due to COVID-19.

Key Findings

- The number of suspensions in 2019-20 dropped by 36% – 1,983 fewer suspensions – than in the 2018-19 school year.
- There were 12 expulsions in 2019-20; this is the lowest level ever recorded in Toronto District School Board.
- When analyzing and comparing suspension/expulsion data for the time period that students were engaged in “in-person” learning during 2019-20 (September 1

to March 15) with the data for the same "time period of the 2018-19 school year, it is noted that in 2019-20:

- There was a slight increase of 1.15 % (41) in the number of suspensions, while the number of expulsions dropped by 40% to the lowest number ever in TDSB.
- The majority of suspensions (78.2%) were given to male students
- 61.6% were given to students who had special education needs
- 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 backgrounds (62.4% vs. 13.7% in 2018-19)
- Indigenous, Black, Middle Eastern and Mixed students were over-represented in the suspensions/expulsions relative to their over-all representation within the TDSB student population. On the other hand, East Asian, South Asian, Southeast Asian and White students were under-represented
- Fighting (17.7%) and physical assault (16.5%) were the top two reasons for suspensions in 2018-19. Bullying accounted for 4.2% of suspensions.
- The most used interventions by schools were contacting the parent/guardian, guidance support, restorative practices and social work.

Action Plan and Associated Timeline

Our emphasis continues to be providing safe, caring and welcoming schools. Building relationships with students is a key part of that work because knowing who our students are allows us to create learning environments that connect directly with their experiences and needs. This work is underscored by our commitment to human rights, equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression.

As part of removing systemic barriers, in August of 2019 the Ministry of Education directed school Boards to eliminate discretionary suspensions for students from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 3. Subsequently, TDSB Trustees went a step further and passed a motion that directed staff to eliminate all historic suspensions from students' records, both electronic and hard copies, issued to students when they were in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 3. The motion further directed that moving forward, a formal retention schedule be set for all suspensions issued, regardless of the grade.

TDSB staff are in the process of implementing this motion and this work should be completed for implementation by the end of September 2021.

To support students' achievement and well-being, to reduce the number of suspensions and expulsions, and to address the over-representation of some groups who are suspended and expelled, we will continue to:

- More effectively address how issues of identity – such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, special education needs and gender – connect with each other and influence decisions regarding the student discipline process;
- Review the detailed breakdown of suspension and expulsion data to identify trends, patterns and opportunities for improvement;
- Support the Caring and Safe Schools team and all school administrators to examine bias, power and privilege as they relate to the student discipline process;
- Support school administrators in the application of human rights, anti-racism and anti-oppression principles in student discipline;
- Review Caring and Safe Schools practices to ensure consistency with principles of anti-racism and anti-oppression;
- Provide learning opportunities for more staff to be trained in Restorative Practices;
- Develop alternatives to suspension programs;
- Work collaboratively with the Centre of Excellence for Black Students Achievement and the Urban Indigenous Education Centre to challenge unconscious bias, engage in joint problem-solving and ensure that Black and Indigenous students are treated equitably when it comes to decisions about suspensions and expulsions in each school through collaboration between Principals and Superintendents;
- Consider and act on the intersectionality's of the data provided in this report, Board Special Education staff must also be involved in the analysis of student discipline matters to ensure that any biases in the student discipline process and any subsequent decisions are being acknowledged and eradicated through interrogation and interruption of practices that appear to be automatic responses to student discipline issues and;
- Work with families and community partners to develop relevant approaches and supports for students.

Access to School Premises 2019-20

For the first time included in this report (Appendix B Access to School Premises 2019-20) is a data set that summarizes the issuance Trespass letters in the Toronto District School Board.

Resource Implications

Funding will be provided through current existing budget allocations.

Communications Considerations

The Caring and Safe Schools report will be shared with key stakeholders through existing TDSB communication channels.

Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

- Caring and Safe Schools Policy (P.051)
- Programs for Students on Long Term Suspension or Expulsion (PR586)
- Police-School Board Protocol (PR698)
- Promoting a Positive School Climate Procedure (PR697)
- Non-Discretionary and Discretionary Student Transfers (PR 540)

Appendices

- Appendix A: Caring and Safe Schools: Annual Report 2019-20
- Appendix B: Access to School Premises 2019-20

From

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

Ted Libera, Centrally Assigned Principal Caring and Safe Schools and Alternative
Programs Ted.Libera@tdsb.on.ca or at 416-396-5411

Ruth Bell, Centrally Assigned Principal Caring and Safe Schools and Alternative
Programs Ruth.Bell@tdsb.on.ca or at 416-394-4030