



## **Board Self-Assessment Committee Report No. 01**

Monday, November 1, 2021  
7:30 p.m.  
Electronic Meeting

Members Present      Trustees Parthi Kandavel (Chair), Alexander Brown, Rachel Chernos Lin, Stephanie Donaldson, David Smith and Anu Sriskandarajah

Regrets                Trustee James Li

Trustees participated by electronic means in accordance with [amendments to Section 7 of Ontario Regulations 463/97, Electronic Meetings.](#)

### **Part A: Committee Recommendations**

No matters to report

### **Part B: For Information Only**

#### **1. Call to Order and Acknowledgement of Traditional Lands**

The meeting was called to order at 7:34 p.m. by electronic means, with Trustee Parthi Kandavel presiding.

#### **2. Approval of the Agenda**

Trustee Chernos Lin, seconded by Trustee Donaldson moved that the agenda be approved.

#### **3. Declarations of Possible Conflict of Interest**

No matters to report

#### **4. Results of the Self-Assessment Tool**

The Committee received a report from Charles Ungerleider of Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group on the results of the Board Self-Assessment Tool, as approved by the Board on November 24, 2020 (see attached).

The Committee discussed:

- The roles and responsibilities of Trustees and the governance structure of the Board;
- The importance of student achievement as a specific area of focus;
- The expectations and powers of the Code of Conduct;
- A plan to respond to the results of the Self-Assessment and continue the work of Board Self-Assessment;
- The continued effort required by Trustees in order to develop a work plan to address the issues identified through the Self-Assessment.

#### **5. Adjournment**

On motion of Trustee Donaldson, seconded by Trustee Sriskandarajah, the meeting adjourned at 8:44 p.m.

#### **Part C: Ongoing Matters**

No matters to report

Submitted by: Parthi Kandavel, Committee Chair

Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool



Toronto District School Board:  
Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

Submitted to:

Board of Trustee  
Toronto District School Board

Vendor:

*Directions* Evidence and Policy Research Group, LLP  
Vancouver: suite 219 – 1321 Pacific Boulevard, Vancouver, BC, V6Z 0E2  
Point of Contact: Charles Ungerleider, Director of Research & Managing Partner  
Telephone Number: 604-600-1040  
E-mail: [cungerleider@directions-eprg.ca](mailto:cungerleider@directions-eprg.ca)

Wednesday, October 20, 2021

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## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

## Executive Summary

The Wilson<sup>1</sup> and Hall<sup>2</sup> reports painted an unflattering portrait of the Toronto District School Board in 2014 and 2015. They described the culture of the TDSB as dysfunctional, the roles and responsibilities of Trustees poorly understood, impaired trustee and senior staff relationships, and many other facets of poor governance. The Hall report averred that the dysfunctional culture of the TDSB had consequences for the district itself as well as its relationships with the citizens of Toronto.

Hall described “jockeying among the 22 trustees to get a 12-trustee majority” that, once secured, made it difficult for the remaining Trustees to engage in a critical discussion of the item under consideration; treating information as “currency” that was shared among an “in group” and isolated the “out group,” leaving the latter feeling marginalized; actions that showed “a clear lack of understanding of the difference between governance and operations”; “partisan politicization” of the position of Trustee where decisions were made “in the best interest of one’s political career rather than the best interests of the students of the board; a complicated and “all encompassing” strategic plan with out “clear performance measures,” etc.

Five year later, the present Board appears to have risen above the level of dysfunction Hall and Wilson described. The agreement among Trustees regarding the responsibilities of office, the roles of the Board’s officers, the norms established in the Board’s code of conduct, their beliefs about education, and the meaning of equity is encouraging. Agreement, especially about the responsibilities of office, the role of the Board, and about the norms in the code of conduct should provide a foundation for productive discussion of the legitimate differences among Trustees. However, it will take significant effort to capitalize on that foundation.

To succeed, Trustees will need to commit themselves to see beyond the horizon of the interests of their immediate constituencies to act in the best interest of the district, to depersonalize their differences, and to treat one another with the respect that every human being deserves. The Board must attend more assiduously to its principal obligations to improve student achievement, reduce inequalities, and improve public confidence in the TDSB.

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson, M. (2014) A Review of the Toronto District School Board.  
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/new/2015/TDSBReview2015.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Hall, B., Bismilla, V., Case, P., Glassco, B., Hoy, S., Powers, R. Williams, J. (2015) Toronto District School Board Governance Advisory Panel Report Submitted to the Honourable Liz Sandals, Minister of Education,  
<http://edu.gov.on.ca/eng/new/2015/TDSB2015.html>

Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

The Board will benefit from a program of professional learning focusing on the requirements of responsible governance, fiduciary responsibility, duty of care, stewardship, and strategic planning and results monitoring – to name some core issues.

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

## Introduction

The current self-assessment was undertaken by the TDSB Board elected in 2018, some members of which were elected in 2014. The self-assessment was conducted during the 2020/2021 school year amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic, and at a time when the TDSB was conducting a search for a Director of Education.

I sought the role of consultant to the TDSB's Board Self-Assessment because such an assessment is instrumental to effective governance that, in turn, should have a material impact on student achievement and well-being, the elimination of educational inequality, and citizen confidence in public schooling. I conveyed that belief in my proposal to the Board:

*Boards of School trustees play a pivotal role in translating the public's views of and aspirations for public education into goals and objectives for the school systems they govern, explaining the educational system to the public, and advocating on behalf of the systems they govern. Their most important tasks are: articulating the goals and objectives of the jurisdiction; expressing the goals in policy; establishing criteria for determining whether those goals and objectives are being achieved through the policies set; assuring that staff collect relevant evidence and appraise that evidence; providing feedback to the public about how well the system is doing; recruiting and selecting their only employee - the Director of Education; and holding that individual to account for the achievement of the goals and objectives expressed in the Board's policies.*

I engaged the Board in the process of developing a tool to gather information key to the self-assessment because I view self-assessment as an educational exercise. By involving the Trustees, I hoped to ensure that the appraisal would address areas of importance to the Board; to build commitment to the process; and to stimulate Trustees to think about the issues and topics addressed by the self-assessment tool in advance of its deployment. I sought to fulfill the desire expressed in the Request for Proposals to provide the Board with the opportunity to:

- look internally at the Board itself;
- allow each Board member to reflect on their individual and shared responsibilities;
- identify different perceptions and opinions among Board members;
- determine areas of responsibility that need attention; and
- use the results as a springboard for Board improvement.

Prior to a project initiation meeting held on October 13, 2020, I reviewed Margaret Wilson's Review of the Toronto District School Board; the [Hall] Toronto District School Board

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Governance Advisory Panel Report (including “Positive Change That’s Working: Submission of TDSB Trustees to the Governance Advisory Panel”); the 2017 and 2018 reports of the TDSB’s Integrity Commissioner; and several board meeting audio recordings. During the project initiation meeting I posed questions to the Board’s Self-Assessment Advisory Committee (SASC). Those question engendered a conversation about many dimensions of the performance of the Board of Trustees. Following that meeting I read J. David Hulchanski’s *Three Cities Within Toronto: Income Polarization Among Toronto’s Neighbourhoods, 1970-2005* report, the TDSB’s Multi-Year Strategic Plan Action Plans, and the Board’s policy documents. This prompted me to conceive of the self-assessment tool in terms of areas addressed in this report.

**Equity** was a topic that figured predominantly in the discussion, in many of the documents and policies that I reviewed, and in my interaction with the SASC. I proposed building consideration of equity into the tool because each person may have a different conception of equity and how the concept applies in an educational setting. The inclusion of the equity case study in the tool was designed to elicit the meanings that Trustees attach to the term and the practical implications of applying such a term.

An initial draft of the Self-Assessment Tool was presented to the SASC and subsequently to the full Board. I sought answers to three questions:

- Do the items in the tool capture the information that the Board seeks?
- Do you see benefit including the section on equity?
- Are there topics or issues that I have overlooked that should be captured?

Both the SASC and the Board provided helpful feedback that was incorporated in a revision to the survey tool.

## Context

### Role of School Boards in Ontario

Ontario’s [Education Act](#) refers to schools boards as partners in the education sector and describes their role as “enhancing student achievement and well-being, closing gaps in student achievement and maintaining confidence in the province’s publicly funded education systems” (2009, c. 25, s. 1).

### The Toronto District School Board

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has been the subject of several reports (Ernst & Young, 2013, Hogarth, 2013, Wilson, 2015, Hall, 2015) critical of its governance and operations.



## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

Hall described “governance dysfunction” arising in part from lack of role clarity, accountability, and leadership that, in turn, were sources of the “erosion of public confidence.” Hall noted that the tension in the role of school trustee was a contributing factor to role confusion on the part of Trustees:

*... trustees are elected by their local communities and are expected to bring the voice of their communities to the board table, but at the same time they are expected to act as a unified body in the best interests of all students of the board (Hall, 2015)*

Confusion and lack of understanding are evident when individuals declare their intention to seek office:

*Candidates who have a different and incorrect understanding of the role make unrealistic campaign promises which they cannot keep. This creates expectations about the role of trustees in the community, whose members then make inappropriate demands on trustees, or on the board of trustees as a whole.*

When seen in light of prior reports about governance, the data from the current self appraisal provides evidence of increased Board awareness of the policies governing the Board’s conduct.

## Beliefs of the Board

Beliefs shape behaviour on an individual level as well as the behaviour of corporate bodies. The Self-Assessment Tool (SAT) asked Trustees to indicate whether, and how strongly, they agreed or disagreed with statements of belief expressed in TDSB documents. To calculate an average response for each question, a numerical value was assigned to the response options: For each statement of belief, a weighted average/mean was calculated by multiplying the number of Trustees responding to a response option by the value assigned to that option. A value of 0 was assigned to “don’t know,” a 1 to “strongly disagree,” a 2 to “disagree,” a 3 to “agree,” and a 4 to “strongly agree.” The products of all assigned values were summed and divided by the total number of Trustees who responded to the question. The dispersion or spread of scores from the average (the standard deviation) was also calculated. The dispersion tells how tightly clustered the responses were. Lower values indicate that scores were tightly grouped around the average while higher values indicate more variability among the responses.

In the Table below, the statements of belief are arranged by the magnitude of the mean scores from highest to lowest.

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

Statement of Belief	# Resp					Rating		Total Resp
	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Don't Know (0)	Mean ↓	SD	
Being accountable for and finding ways to improve student achievement should be of paramount importance to the TDSB.	20	1	0	0	0	3.95	0.22	21
The TDSB should maintain an environment respectful of human rights and free of discrimination and harassment for all persons.	20	1	0	0	0	3.95	0.22	21
The TDSB should provide a safe, nurturing, and positive learning and working environment, free of harassment and discrimination, where every individual is treated with dignity and respect.	19	2	0	0	0	3.90	0.30	21
Parents and community members should have opportunities to participate in the school system, and the Board should provide the support necessary to achieve that goal.	17	4	0	0	0	3.81	0.40	21
Systemic barriers to equitable recruitment, selection, hiring, training and development, career counselling, transfer processes, performance assessment, and promotion in the TDSB should be identified and eliminated.	16	5	0	0	0	3.76	0.44	21
There should be demonstrable evidence that hiring, employment, and promotion practices in the TDSB are equitable.	15	6	0	0	0	3.71	0.46	21
There should be demonstrable evidence that the TDSB is committed to Employment Equity.	14	7	0	0	0	3.67	0.48	21
The TDSB's outreach activities and affirmative action strategies (e.g., encouragement, mentoring, training, and staff development) should ensure that there is equitable representation in all occupational groups within the TDSB.	13	8	0	0	0	3.62	0.50	21
Community groups/organizations should have fair and equitable access to Board facilities when they are not being used for educational purposes.	11	10	0	0	0	3.52	0.51	21
The TDSB should enable all students to reach high levels of achievement and acquire the knowledge, skills, and values they need to become responsible members of a democratic society.	18	2	1	0	0	3.81	0.51	21
Trustee newsletters or similar trustee publications produced and paid for by the Board and intended for mass distribution to constituents should not contain criticisms of other trustees or statements that could cause the Board embarrassment or liability.	17	3	1	0	0	3.76	0.54	21
The TDSB should have a performance management process it uses to develop clear objectives for the Board and the Director of Education and to provide an annual evaluation of the Director's work.	17	3	1	0	0	3.76	0.54	21

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

Statement of Belief	# Resp					Rating		Total Resp
	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Don't Know (0)	Mean ↓	SD	
The Director of Education should not be obligated to follow direction from individual trustees, or committee chairs unless such authority has been specifically delegated by the Board as a whole.	9	11	1	0	0	3.38	0.59	21
Environmental literacy for all students should be integral to the TDSB's mission to help prepare our students to become responsible members of a democratic society.	9	10	2	0	0	3.33	0.66	21
The performance of the TDSB should be synonymous with the performance of the Director of Education.	6	11	4	0	0	3.10	0.70	21
The TDSB should hold high expectations for all learners.	17	3	0	1	0	3.71	0.72	21
Students should have the right to access programs and schools that best meet their needs, interests, and aptitudes.	12	6	2	1	0	3.38	0.86	21
The Board should abide by its established Communications Protocol and Information Flow Protocol when posing questions to the Director of Education.	8	12	0	0	1	3.24	0.89	21
The Board should not formally or informally evaluate any employee of the Board except for the Director of Education.	12	5	2	1	1	3.24	1.14	21
The Board should never give direction to any employee of the Board who reports directly or indirectly to the Director of Education.	7	8	2	1	3	2.71	1.38	21



## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

Every Trustee but one strongly agreed with the first belief in the table: *Being accountable for and finding ways to improve student achievement should be of paramount importance to the TDSB*. The remaining Trustee agreed with the statement. The mean response for this belief was 3.95 and the standard deviation was .22, indicating that the responses were very tightly clustered.

In contrast, the responses to last belief in the table - *The Board should never give direction to any employee of the Board who reports directly or indirectly to the Director of Education* – were more dispersed (SD. = 1.38) around the mean of 2.71. The mean of 2.71 indicates a value about three-quarters of the ‘distance’ between disagree and agree. The dispersion can be seen in the pattern of the responses: 7 Trustees strongly agreed with the statement, 8 agreed, 2 disagreed, 1 strongly disagreed, and 3 said they did not know.

Trustees may not wish to discuss belief statements about which there is substantial agreement. However, discussion of beliefs about which there is substantial disagreement is strongly recommended. Four Trustees disagreed with the statement “*The performance of the TDSB should be synonymous with the performance of the Director of Education.*” Three Trustees disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “*the Board should never give direction to any employee of the Board who reports directly or indirectly to the Director of Education*” and three Trustees said they did not know. Three Trustees disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “*the Board should not formally or informally evaluate any employee of the Board except for the Director of Education*” and one Trustees said s/he did not know. These responses indicate to me that all Trustees do not understand the relationship between the Board and its Director of Education.

The Director of Education is the Board’s only employee and hence the single point of contact between governance (the Board) and administration (the Director of Education). It is for that reason that performance of the district is regarded as synonymous with the performance of the Director of Education, the one person responsible for translating the Board’s policies, values, and goals into action. Boards should not give direction to or evaluate any district employees reporting to the Director. The direction that employees receive should come from the Director. All district employees report directly or indirectly to the Director of Education, not to the Board. Hence, good governance and the Board’s own policies prohibit the Board from evaluating district employees other than the Director of Education.

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Although there were few clarifying comments about the beliefs, several Trustees made comments related to the primacy of student needs, including the sentiment that their needs should be met within the school in their catchment area. One Trustee wrote a lengthy comment that seemed to reflect the value of giving primacy to students:

*I hope we [the Board] become more accountable in making sure that students have the tools that are required for them to become good members of society and attentive to equity and fairness to employees, student, staff, parents, caregivers, and stakeholders to ensure better outcomes.*

## Equity and its Application

The issue of “equity” was prominent in conversations with the Board and among the members of the Self-Assessment Subcommittee. That is not surprising. Equity is an issue that all school boards must address.

One of the principal challenges that Trustees face is getting clear about what one another means by equity and, most important, forging a common understanding that the Board can apply to the difficult decisions it must make. This section of the SAT included a task to collect information to help Trustees understand equity and its application.

### Overview of the Task

Almost everyone can agree in principle with equity. The challenge arises in attempting to apply one’s conception of equity. The exercise below describes in broad terms a fictional school board (the Metropolitan School Board), its policy about ensuring equity, and decisions that the (fictional) Director made. In addition to probing the interpretation of equity, the task was designed to reinforce the distinction between the responsibility of the governors of the system (the Board) to set policy and the application of policy by the Director of Education.

Members of the TDSB Board were asked to decide if the Director was or was not in compliance with the Metropolitan School Board’s equity policy and to explain their reasoning.

#### The Metropolitan Board of Education

The Metropolitan Board of Education serves a very diverse citizenry. Its student population is approximately 120,000 and its annual budget is approximately \$1.2B.

There is a 6-member Board of Trustees. Each trustee represents citizens in one of the six regions. Each region serves approximately the same number of pupils but differs in other ways.

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Regions 1 (Centre City) and Region 2 (Parkland) encompass part of the city's downtown core and extend out to the suburbs. Centre City's population includes many of the workers who are part of the City's large hospitality industry as well as the clerical and technical staff that work in the City. Parkland's population includes many retirees who have returned to the City's core, younger families, and the residents of a suburban area that has developed in the last 15-20 years because of construction of a major freeway. That suburb is home to many of the service workers and clerical and technical workers who are employed downtown.

Regions 3 (Metro Ville) and 4 (City Island), like Regions 1 and 2, are each located in the city. Metro Ville includes a large population of apartment dwellers roughly divided between renters and residents of the City's social housing. Located in City Island are the light industries that remain in the community (plumbing and electrical supply and repair companies, a server-farm, a manufacturer of chains and fasteners, etc.) and the homes of those who work in those industries – residents living in semi-detached row houses. About half of City Island's families live in apartments that have been built where the warehouse district was once located.

Region 5 (University Hills), as its name implies, is the site of a major research university. The population of the region is, compared to the other regions, quite affluent. The population includes many of the non-academic staff at the University and its affiliated hospital and most of its professional staff.

Region 6 (Middleton) is a region primarily populated by middle-income families and individuals. Some reside in single-family homes and others in older apartments and newer condominiums. Many of the school-age children in in Middleton come from two-income families.

## The MBE Equity Policy

The Metropolitan Board of Education (MBE) has two priorities. Improving outcomes for students and reducing or eliminating educational inequalities.

One of the Board's policies states "***The Metropolitan Board of Education (MBE) believes that public education is an important force for overcoming social and educational inequalities. Therefore, The MBE expects that the Director of Education (Director) will work to ensure equity among students and in the treatment of students, parents, staff, and community.***" The Director of Education proposed, and the Board accepted, the interpretation of equity to mean "***the impartial assignment of opportunities, rewards, and punishments in light of the careful consideration of the needs and circumstances of students, schools, and school communities.***"

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

TDSB Trustees were asked to decide whether the MBE Director of Education had followed the policy of the MBE Board and to consider the MBE Director's justification for the decisions made.

## Overall Results

There was remarkable agreement among TDSB Trustees regarding whether the MBE Director of Education complied with MBE Board's equity policy. Although there was no unanimity, agreement among TDSB Trustees exceeded 80% in ten of the 12 scenarios. In the remaining two, there was about a 60%/40% split.

Scenario	Following	NOT following
Alternative programs	19	1
Breakfast program	19	2
Chemistry teacher	2	19
International Baccalaureate	2	19
Music programs	2	19
Parent volunteer and pay	2	18
Full-day K cancellation	2	17
Materials costs	3	18
Mom & Tots	17	4
Culinary arts	4	17
Cross-catchment	7	13
Tax fundraising and reallocate	12	8

## Scenarios

## Alternative Programs

*The Metropolitan Board of Education offers a suite of alternative programs, several of which are designed to retain students who, in the absence of those programs, might leave prior to graduation. The class sizes at these alternative schools are set below the contractual limits in the teachers' collective agreement to allow the teachers more time to meet the needs of the students.*

19 of the 20 TDSB Trustees responding to this scenario said the MBE Director of Education followed the Board's equity policy by setting the class size at the alternate schools below the contractual limits in the teachers' collective agreement to allow the teachers more time to meet the needs of the students enrolled in those programs. Trustees said that the Director had considered "*the needs and circumstances of students, schools, and school communities*" in

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arriving at the decision. One Trustee summed up most of the comments with the following observation:

*Vulnerable students tend to be those facing challenges (special education needs, poverty, family situations, mental health, racism). They require differential supports to succeed. Directing additional resources to those classes is a way to address equity in education.*

Other Trustees wrote, "class sizes set to below limits could provide the conditions necessary for students to thrive" and "there needs to be system flexibility to support students to achieve their personal best, this is the essence of equity work." The comment that we classified as dissenting (not in compliance) believed that setting a class size below that set in the collective agreement might be in violation of that agreement.

## Breakfast Program

*The Director has approved a breakfast program for all elementary school students in the four regions of the Metropolitan Board of Education that are in the centre of the City because the Director believes provision of a breakfast program will benefit elementary school students whose families experience food insecurity. The program will require \$20M/year. Although costly, the Director believes strongly that such a program will produce better school attendance and more positive educational outcomes.*

19 of the 21 Trustees said the Director had followed MBE's equity policy. However, when considering the responses of those saying the Director was not following the MBE policy, it appeared that the dissenters were agreeing with those assenting. The reasons supporting the Director's decision referred to the sections of the policy that state "the Metropolitan Board of Education (MBE) believes that public education is an important force for overcoming social and educational inequalities" and that consideration had been given to the "needs and circumstances of students, schools, and school communities."

Most Trustees agreed or strongly agree that it was justified to make food program accessible to underserved regions of the city:

*Provision of a breakfast program in those areas of the city where families are most in need is a way that public education can be a force for overcoming social inequalities like food security issues and will help achieve better achievement outcomes for those students.*

Trustees made the point that the policy could go further to serve families in need, not families in a particular region.



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*In theory, yes this is equitable. I do worry there could be some families in other [more affluent] regions who need this help too. A true [equity] policy would try to search out those families and ensure they too are helped.*

Another wrote:

*The model of delivery [in this scenario] seems overly simplified. Need should be assessed based on regions but should also have a mechanism to serve high needs individuals who fall outside the designated regions. All school administrators should have the ability to access supports for individual students whose need is greater than the general population of the school.*

The dissenters made similar points, arguing that the Director was not following the policy because s/he was not considering students outside of these regions who have the same needs.

## Chemistry Teacher

*When Clara Rose, a chemistry teacher, received the Governor General's Award for Excellence in teaching, the publicity it attracted (television, Facebook, podcasts, Twitter, newspapers) prompted a flood of requests from parents to allow their offspring to enroll in her Chemistry 11 classes. To manage the flood of requests, the school proposed, and the Director approved, the following criteria (in priority order) for determining eligibility to enroll.*

- a) Grade attained in Science 10*
- b) Recommendation of the guidance counsellor that the nominee had a good chance of having honour roll status in grade 11 and 12*
- c) Participation in extra-curricular activities*

17 of the 19 Trustees who said that the Director had not followed MBE Board's equity policy wrote comments. The two who said the MBE Director was following the policy made no comment. Almost half of the Trustees responding said that the requirements will privilege students who have more social and economic advantages.

*Based on a student's social, economic, and cultural circumstance, he or she may not meet some or all the criteria outlined by the Director. It is important that all students, based on equity, have an opportunity to apply to Chemistry class.*

Another wrote:

*I do not see how "careful consideration of the needs and circumstances of students, schools, and school communities" is being applied here. Given the*

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*demographics of the Regions, there is need for a much closer look at the data beyond the parameters presented here. I doubt that this approach will lead to overcoming many of the social and educational inequalities that the MBE has. This [decision] is more likely to lead to a specialized program that creates its own prestige and set of high standards that will not be accessible to ALL STUDENTS.*

## Another commented:

*If we are only looking at marks attained and involvement in extracurriculars, we are selecting those who likely have opportunities based on socio-economic background. Those kids likely have more opportunities outside school, such as tutoring and enrichment programs, or families who have the time and experience to search out those things to give their children a leg up. Better to look for potential. Give kids chances they might not have. Maybe kids have an outside job to help support their family instead of time and money to play sports. The director should be creating criteria that allows kids a chance to develop, not looking for kids who already have those things in spades.*

## Another Trustee wrote:

*None of the listed criteria considers the challenges faced by equity seeking groups, rather they [the criteria] favor students who have the means and ability to attain good grades and participate in extra pursuits. The criteria do not consider needs (learning supports, poverty) or even balance acceptance from different areas of the city.*

## Still another wrote:

*Ugh. This is such a perfect example of how privilege works in practice. To answer simply - the reason this is against the policy is that it provides "partial" (not impartial) assignment of opportunities. The bulleted list causes me to reflect on the matter of time-poverty, which is a very real issue for families who lack resources and need to work longer to feed and house their family, providing them with less time to help with homework/afford tutors, call a guidance counsellor to gain favour, actively support or participate in child's extra-curricular activities.*

Other Trustees said that all students should have access to programming if they want, regardless of achievement and extra-curricular activities. The criteria are barriers to access.

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Others said that the decision was not impartial assignment or consideration of “the needs and circumstances of students, schools, and school communities.”

*By prioritizing the eligibility criteria, the Director has not followed “the impartial assignment of opportunities, rewards, and punishments in light of the careful consideration of the needs and circumstances of students, schools, and school communities.” In essence the Director is saying only students who achieve should have accessibility to great teachers and that flies in the face of equity.*

Another wrote:

*Students with the highest academic achievement do not have any more right to a good teacher than other students and in fact, struggling students may have more need of a teacher identified as excellent to put them on even footing with those who already thriving in school.*

## International Baccalaureate

*Over the years, the Metropolitan Board of Education has seen attrition of high-performing high school students whose parents have enrolled them in private schools that offer the International Baccalaureate Program. The principal of University Hills High School has proposed, and the Director approved, that University Hills Secondary School can offer the International Baccalaureate program. The Director argues that, although the MBE will have to license the right to offer the program, the retention of market share will be worth the additional expense that she feels confident can be raised by the parents’ committee.*

Two of the 21 Trustees responding to this situation said the Director said the approval of the IB program was consonant with the Board’s equity policy. Only one of the two Trustees offered justification for that viewpoint:

*The financial [advantages] of a student's parents should not be used to discriminate against the needs of certain student groups. If the Board intends to provide students with the educational support that they require, then this group of students should not be excluded. However, the Board should also transfer the third-party costs [for the IB program] to the parents of these students to support students from families that are challenged financially.*

This scenario elicited responses from almost all the Trustees who said the Director had not complied with Board policy. The Trustee above sought to redefine the scenario by instituting a tax on advantaged parents that would be used to fund less advantaged students. Another Trustee took an opposing position:

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*There should be the implementation of an IB program at this school. However, the parents should not be responsible for funding the program, despite how attractive that option might be.*

This Trustee's comment was one of several comments made under the theme that "*parents should not have to pay for board programming.*" That the parent' committee would have to supplement the cost of the IB program is not consistent with the MBE equity policy. "*Board programming should not be financially dependent on parent committee raised funds.*" Another wrote "*Parents should not be required to fundraise for programming.*"

The responses reflected the tensions that Trustees perceived:

*It should not be up to the parents' committee to raise those funds. If that is the case, the Board is stacking the deck in favour of students from well-heeled families in contrast to having the program open to all and starting off from a place of inequity. The Board can offer the program by having a sliding tuition scale and funding those students whose families face financial challenges or can make the program fee-free and use the Board's budget to pay the programming fees.*

Several Trustees said that having parents pay creates a two-tier system of education. "*Putting the cost on the parents is essentially a form of privatization of public education, saying that students whose parents can afford programs will have access to them.*"

Another Trustee wrote:

*Offering specialized programs can enhance the educational experience but programs need to be offered in an equitable manner. There are pressures on Boards to compete with public and private sector schools/school boards for "bums in seats," but this should not be the defining consideration in developing programs.*

*Do students from all economic backgrounds want such a program or just students from one neighbourhood and economic background? If students from diverse economic backgrounds want the program, it should be developed with access to students from across the system.*

Another Trustee expressed disagreement with fee-based programs that may cater to those with existing privileges, writing:

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*The 'game' of trying to retain affluent students in the public system by giving them a private school-like experience through programs like IB is a very slippery slope. The biggest losers are the underprivileged students who have resources sucked away towards serving the privileged. It is also an unwinnable battle. Private school parents operate with a consumer mindset and will keep "shopping" for the best product/school in any event, no matter what a public board should do.*

*With resources always scarce, it does not take much at all to tilt an entire system towards serving privilege at the expense of those who really need the resources. The MBE School Boards' energy would be better spent on advocating for the funding needed to deliver high quality education for ALL and making operational decisions that are truly equitable.*

Another Trustee pointed out that a program's location is itself a barrier to access. Not all students are able to pursue programs outside of the immediate communities.

Two Trustees felt that the MBE Board should not be paying for a program that does not follow public curriculum. The first commented:

*The MBE should not be spending funds to retain students who wish a private program that does not follow the public curriculum and requires teachers with additional certification from an outside body. "Retention of market share" is a horrible phrase that should not be used in public education and does not make sense as a justification for the additional expense.*

The second Trustee wrote:

*High performing students will continue to have high performance and good outcomes whether they are in private school or at the MBE. Providing them with challenging courses that meet their needs is an equitable approach. Offering the IB program in the secondary school in the highest socio-economic region does not in itself mean that equity is not being created, but it is less likely that students who are not seen as "high-performing" may have much access to such a program. I am not certain that "market share" should ever be a condition for a board to make a program decision about student education... and yet it often is.*

One Trustee said the decision should have been brought to the MBE Board for approval. However, bringing such decisions to the Board confuses an operational decision of the Director (application of Board policy) with a governance decision of the Board (its equity policy). The

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Board's role is to set policies reflecting its goals and leave the interpretation of those policies to the Director. If the Director's decision is inconsistent with the interpretation of the Board's equity policy (in this case, "the impartial assignment of opportunities, rewards, and punishments in light of the careful consideration of the needs and circumstances of students, schools, and school communities"), the Board may make its displeasure known in its annual appraisal of the Director. If the Director fails to implement the Board's policies, the Board can fire the Director

## Music Program

*The Metropolitan Board of Education has excellent music programs, and the students in these programs have won accolades. Enrollments have increased steadily over the years. The district's stock of instruments is aging, but the MBE does not have the resources to refresh them. It plans to announce that, beginning in two years' time, students who wish to enroll in the music programs will need to supply their own instruments.*

Issues of equity can arise in programming decisions as well in the decisions to equip students with the tools they need for the programs offered. Two TDSB Trustees believed that the plan was consistent with MBE's equity policy. Of the two, only one Trustee provided justification, arguing: "I hate to say this, but I think if you read the policy to the letter the fact that the program is open to all students means that the director is following the equity policy." But that Trustee thought the decision was "very bad," saying the MBE "should find a way to pay for the instruments or cancel the program." This Trustee recognized that policies such as the equity policy must be applied in a manner that considers scarce resources.

While many Trustees said that providing one's own instrument was a barrier to access and that the MBE should provide ways to help students in need to obtain instruments, they largely ignored the implications of making decisions in an atmosphere of scarce resources:

*To make students provide their own instruments would be in violation of the spirit of equity passed by this board, as it states: "the impartial assignment of opportunities, rewards, and punishments in light of the careful consideration of the needs and circumstances of students, schools, and school communities." In this case, the Director and Board are not considering the circumstances of students and that purchasing an instrument would be a barrier to participation for some families, and so, in essence, not equitable.*

Another Trustee wrote:

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*The director seems to have assumed that all parents can afford the instruments. By making that assumption the Director is not following its equity policy.*

Like the Trustees above, another Trustee said that the School Board should provide the materials and equipment for the programs offered by the Board. One Trustee suggested that the MBE should give each school a budget to “purchase and replenish educational tools including musical instruments,” allowing each school to determine the programs they will offer in relation to “local demand.”

## Outdoor-adventure School

*The Director has approved the establishment of an outdoor-adventure school experience for middle school students. But, to provide sufficient supervision, parents must volunteer and pay for their own food and accommodation.*

Two Trustees said the Director had followed the Board’s equity policy and 18 said the Director had not. Of the two, one said that the Director had followed MBE policy if “support programs for low-income families” had been established. But most Trustees said that the director’s approach had created barriers to equitable access, pointing out that many parents need to work and could not afford the time required. One Trustee expressed the views of many:

*This is not equitable because it requires volunteers who can afford to pay their own way. As a consequence, the program would likely be offered in communities where families can take time off of work and afford to pay for this added expense.*

Another Trustee wrote:

*Again, the director seems to have assumed all parents in all middle schools can pay for food and accommodation and take time to attend. The Director’s decision does not take into account the “careful consideration of the needs and circumstances of students, schools and school communities”*

Several Trustees proposed that the Director eliminate the need for parent volunteers by deploying staff to assist with the supervision and/or providing an equity fund that could pay the expense. These Trustees did not indicate where the resources for the supervisors or equity fund would come from.



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## Full Day Kindergarten

*For many years, the Metropolitan Board of Education has offered full-day kindergarten for students in schools located in communities faced by economic challenges. A disproportionate number of the children in these schools come to school without knowledge of their colours, shapes, numbers, and letters. These communities are also ones in which newcomers to Canada initially settle. Many of the children of these newcomers do not speak English. A significant proportion of the children in these schools are Indigenous.*

*The MBE research department has been following the educational trajectories of these students. It has found that the initial gains made by the students in the full-day kindergarten schools fade by the beginning of grade three and they [the full-day kindergarten students] graduate from school in the same proportion as their peers who have only had the benefit of half-day kindergarten, the norm in most of the schools in the MBE. Having learned of these results, the director decides that the MBE will no longer support a full-day kindergarten program. The Director decided to use the savings from cancelling the full-day kindergarten program to mount a professional learning program for all primary teachers intended to build their capacity for developing early literacy and numeracy.*

Two Trustees said that the Director was following the Board equity policy. The Director had considered the data that showed the full-day kindergarten program 'gains' had faded by grade three and those students had the same long-term outcome as the half-day kindergarten students. Having learned that, the director tried something new.

Several Trustees misconstrued the results of the research presented in the scenario, believing erroneously that they showed the full day program was successful. Several Trustees argued wrongly that the equity policy supported the continuation of the full day program because "it gives kids who need it the leg up to work to the level others achieve," but the facts of the scenario said otherwise. One Trustee said that s/he was confused by the scenario but said if the gains for full-day kindergarten students were not better than the gains made by the students in half day kindergarten, the decision was equitable.

Some Trustees ignored the evidence presented in the scenario and questioned the research. Some argued that because the full day kindergarten kids had graduated at the same rate as students in the half day program, it "proved that the full day program worked." But that overlooks the fact that any gains that the full-day kindergarten children made during the initial years of schooling faded by grade three and the full-day kindergarten students graduated at the same rate as the half-day students.

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Some Trustees speculated that discontinuing the program might lead to a recurrence of the gaps the program was designed to overcome. Although the program was designed to address a readiness gap (children in these schools come to school without knowledge of their colours, shapes, numbers, and letters), one Trustee made a comment about the impact of discontinuing the program on dual-income families and women. While discontinuing the full-day program might have had the impact that the Trustee speculated about, enabling employment of dual-income families was not its objective.

## Materials Cost

*There are several courses offered throughout the Metropolitan Board of Education that are materials intensive (photography, furniture design, culinary arts, film production). The Director has decided that students enrolled in those courses must pay a materials fee equivalent to the wholesale cost of the consumable materials required.*

Three of the 21 Trustees said that the Director was following the policy, the others said that the Director was not compliant. Those who believed the Director complied with the policy believed *"costs for programs that are above the requirements of the curriculum should be transferred to the students' parents."* One qualified his/her judgment by saying that provision should be made *"to help those students in financially challenged families."*

Most of the Trustees who said the Director's decision was not in compliance with the policy said that its application might exclude some students from enrolling in the courses. Others said that *"students should not be required to pay fees to attend school or enroll in any coursework provided by the MBE."* Another Trustee in the no-camp noted that students may be embarrassed by having to seek financial assistance (*"they have to out themselves"*).

One Trustee spoke to the implication of providing courses for which the Board might absorb the cost:

*We cannot offer everything to everyone without something having to give. In theory, no one should have to pay for any part of education, but, in reality, field trips and other similar experiences cannot be offered without some families pitching in, and the enrichment that those experiences offer may be worth having some families contribute who can. It is a slippery slope, but we must be realistic, too.*

## Moms &amp; Tots

*The Director has authorized the establishment of a Mom & Tots program in Region 3 (Metro Ville) that has the largest population of newcomers who speak languages other than English. The Director believes that having such a program will smooth the transition to kindergarten for*

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*students that often struggle in their initial entry to school, hastening their language development and the language development of their mothers so the toddler's language English language skills are reinforced by an adult in the home.*

Most (17) Trustees said that the Director was following the Board's equity policy; four said he was not. Those in the former category said that the program addressed barriers, was needs-based, and addressed inequities. One Trustee's comment seemed to sum up a broadly shared sentiment:

*The Director can stand by the section of the policy that states "the Metropolitan Board of Education (MBE) believes that public education is an important force for overcoming social and educational inequalities." Provision of a language program for pre-kindergarten newcomer families in the city where families are most in need is a way that public education can be a force for overcoming social inequalities and help achieve better achievement outcomes for these early learners and their newcomer families. The director should also authorize it as a pilot and discuss the possibility of expansion if it proves effective.*

Some among those affirming the Director's decision said that parents from all regions of the city should have access to the program and the program's impact should be assessed.

*The program needs to be able to respond to students from similar backgrounds in other areas of the city as well. There may be a greater need in Region 3 but limiting the program to one region does not quite meet the equity goals for students who may have similar needs. The Director is following the MBE's policy, but flexibility is needed in how and where the program is offered.*

Those saying that the Director's decision did not conform with the policy said that access to the program needed to be broader than just women/mothers:

*The application of the equity policy is not equitable because it makes provision only for women/mothers eligible. A caregiver and tot program would be better and more equitable. Maybe mom is working or caring for an elderly relative and cannot leave home; maybe dad is home while mom is working. The theory behind the program is based on an equity approach, but the way it is structured may pose barriers to inclusion.*

Another Trustee questioned the Director's conduct of her/his work:

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*I believe the Directors should have conducted a survey to all the regions of the board to determine parental interest in the program and locate the program in the region where interest is greatest. A survey will give the Director a sense of where the programs need to be located and not cause any inequities.*

## Culinary Arts Program

*The hospitality industry in the City is booming and there are employment opportunities for qualified high school students to begin a career in culinary arts. There is only one high school, located in the far eastern part of the city, that is equipped with a commercial kitchen for providing such a program. The Director approved the location of the program in that school. The program accommodates 140 students per year. Students in the school will be given priority access and the places will be open to any student in any region of the school district, but every applicant must provide her or his own transportation.*

Four of 21 Trustees said the Director had followed the Board's equity policy; 17 said that the Director had not followed the policy. At least two of those saying the Director had complied with the policy should be in the no camp because of the assumptions or qualification they made. Some of them made assumptions about access to transportation, wanted priority given to students with special needs, or the program expanded to other locations - points made by those who said the Director was not in compliance with the MBE's equity policy. One Trustee on the yes aide summarized the sentiments expressed by some of the other Trustee's in the no-camp:

*I believe the Director is following the policy. But I do not think it is equitable. If accommodation is being made for students requiring transportation to the region and a process for ensuring that particular groups of students - for example those classified as students with special needs - are given a priority in this program, then that would be a better approach. The Board should look into other possible locations with professional kitchens - including partnerships with the city, other boards etc.*

## Another wrote:

*It is the only school that can physically offer the program. If students at the school are given priority access, it is because it is their home school and, one would have to assume, they attended knowing that there is an emphasis on culinary arts. There is no equity issue with providing one's own transportation because transportation is not an equity of access issue UNLESS the students cannot afford the subway/bus pass to attend, and one would have to assume that the MBE has some type of equity policy in place for students who need*



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*assistance with subway/bus fare (as most boards in big cities do). The fact that it is open to any student in the board, means it follows the equity policy.*

There were Trustees who said that students already enrolled in the school should not be given priority access, that access should be universal, and conducted by lottery.

## Catchment Areas

*For a variety of reasons there are schools in the Metropolitan Board of Education that are sought by parents of students from outside their catchment areas. Provision is made for cross-catchment enrollment on a space-available basis. The Director authorizes a plan to allow schools to prioritize applications on a first-come first-served basis after accommodating parents of children whose siblings attended the same school (legacy registration).*

There was a wider division of opinion among Trustees about the Director's decision. Seven Trustees said the Director was following the MBE's equity policy, but 13 said the Director was not.

Trustees' that said the Director was following policy made a variety to comments. Although supporting the decision of the Director, one Trustee observed:

*This 'optional attendance' scheme follows the equity policy. BUT, it inadvertently contributes to the 'good school/bad school' reputations that rip tight-knit communities apart...especially in high-density areas. Such policies contribute to the decline of communities because families take all their energy and community assets and invest them OUTSIDE of the community in which they live in because they believe the education will be superior at another school. A better policy is to give a Principals/Superintendents combined discretion to allow students from outside catchment areas to enroll based on exceptional circumstances.*

Those who said the Director is not following the Board's equity policy pointed out that 'first-come, first-served' privileges those with resources and is not equitable. A lottery was regarded by some Trustees as more equitable.

*First-come, first-served often means those with the most resources (English as first language, social and school system connections, ability to drop off forms during the workday, devices/internet to receive information and forms) get easier access to programs.*

Another wrote:

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*[The Director's decision] creates a system of 'have schools' and 'have not schools' ... causing flight from low income and racialized neighbourhoods to schools perceived to be better...*

As in many of the scenarios, Trustees appeared to want to become involved in issues that are the purview of the Director:

*All students within the region should be prioritized over out of region applicants. The Director should also develop a transparent and consistent central protocol for application (not school based) that looks at equity, unmet needs being, and transportation. External applicants should only be accepted if the program is under-enrolled by local students. However, consistent local under-enrollment should trigger a review of the program and whether it is serving the needs of students in that region.*

## Tax Fundraising and Reallocate:

*Parent fund-raising occurs in most of the schools in the Metropolitan Board of Education. A few schools raise quite large sums of money each year. The majority raise moderate amounts, and a few very little. In keeping with the Board's equity policy, the Director of Education has announced that, beginning in the next school year, all schools in the MBE will be taxed 25% of the funds raised by parents. Those funds will be re-allocated to schools to create greater equity among schools.*

This scenario prompted great divergence of opinion among Trustees. 12 Trustees said the Director was following the Board's policy and eight disagreed, saying that the Director was not following the MBE's equity policy. Among those agreeing with the Director's decision were some who wished more information about how the director would determine how the funds would be re-distributed.

Trustees who said the Director was not following the MBE policy wanted to require community and parental consultation and Board decision, taking the decision out of the hands of the Director

*This is a tricky situation that requires community consultation and parent involvement in making a final decision on how funds should be collectively allocated/used. If parents are the ones raising this money, the Director alone should never be the one to decide on how to equitably re-distribute the funds. This would require a Board decision.*

Another Trustee write:

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*Taxation on local fundraising is a bad idea that will discourage parents from donating to schools. If the board wants to create a pool, then it should create a dedicated donation path for community members to contribute directly to those schools that are in need.*

In a similar vein:

*This is a poor idea that would not consistently serve need and will create resentment and distrust. A better approach would be to ensure that Board resources and programs are consistently directed towards school communities in need. Addressing need should be built into policy and procedure that relies on the board's own resources. The Director could choose to create donor or sponsorship programs that encourage the schools that can raise more substantial funds to donate but this is secondary to the overall role of the director and the Board.*

Top up funding provided by the MBE to schools that were less successful in raising funds was proposed by another Trustee.

**Observations:**

The responses to the scenarios prompt several observations:

Inequality, scarcity, and policy

In most of the scenarios, the condition that the MBE Director faced was resource scarcity. While it may be convenient to ignore resource scarcity in the context of these fictional scenarios, it is something that cannot be ignored when confronted by hard choices.

The need for policy arises because of scarcity. If resources were plentiful, a policy for their allocation would be unnecessary. Well-developed policy provides guidance for the allocation of scarce resources, especially when coupled with a clear statement of priorities.

Most of the comments of Trustees indicated that they found it difficult to confront the underlying problem of resource scarcity. This occurred in many scenarios (see for example the music program and outdoor adventure scenarios). Some Trustees said that there should be funding for the musical instruments or to pay the expenses of parent volunteers. While that might be an attractive 'solution,' it does not confront the fundamental problem that, if funds are provided for these, the funds must come from elsewhere. The resources for class size reductions in the alternative program scenario would also need to be found elsewhere.

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Some Trustees recognized scarcity and the challenge it poses (*"We cannot offer everything to everyone without something having to give"* and *"With resources always scarce . . ."*), but not often. Scarcity makes decision-making difficult and the establishment of policy important.

With exceptions that are insignificant, school boards are unable to raise revenue for things they would like to support but for which they do not have the resources. For that reason, boards must have clear priorities so that the Director has a reference point for the difficult decisions s/he needs to make. A board's strategic plan – if it is well developed – provides a framework that can provide such guidance. In the absence of surplus revenue or the ability to generate revenue, a decision to fund a new program or service inevitably comes at the expense of an exiting program or service. Making decisions for which the Board does not have the resources is a breach in the board's obligation to be a steward of its scarce resources.

## Equity

There are several different types of equity. It is not surprising that Trustees wrote about equity of access/opportunity, but, in most instances, ignored that equity often requires a redistribution of resources. The scenario in which the Director proposed to impose a tax on fundraising and redistribute some of the funds to schools with less fund-raising capacity was an example of [re]distributional equity.

Equity of student results and outcomes is even more important than equity of opportunity because the latter is simply a means to the former. As will be seen later in this report, TDSB Trustees do not seem as concerned about student results or outcomes as they might be given that improvement of student results and outcomes is the prime obligation of school boards.

## Board intrusion into operational matters

A consistent pattern in the responses indicates that Trustees believe that the Board can tell the Director how to do the job for which the Director was hired. For example, asserting that *the Director has made unwarranted assumptions*, or saying the Director should have: *designated the mom and tot program for caregiver and tots, created a fund to support students who cannot afford an experience, employed a survey to gather information, located a program in another region of the MBE, assured access to transportation, or wanted priority given to students with special needs* are among the many instances of telling the Director how the work of the Board should be carried out or 'second guessing' the Director's decision.

The Board sets policy and goals and monitors the results achieved, the Director is responsible for implementing the policy and designing the means of achieving the goals. If results indicate that the policy has not been implemented or has been contravened or the goals not achieved,



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those observations should be included in the annual evaluation of the Director. If after considering such matters the Board remains dissatisfied with the Directors' performance, it should dismiss the Director.

## Interpreting facts to support a preferred position

There was also a tendency among Trustees to interpret the facts of a case in a manner that would support a preferred position or outcome. This was most evident in the full-day kindergarten scenario. Many Trustees avoided confronting the evidence that the FDK program benefits had faded by the beginning of grade three and that the Indigenous students and newcomers in the full day kindergarten programs graduated from high school in the same proportion as their peers who had the benefit of only a half-day kindergarten program. In that and other scenarios, Trustees appeared to be trying to shift the discourse or specify other conditions to avoid confronting the difficult judgments that the scenarios called for.

## Disambiguating policy

The application of policy is challenging in the face of ambiguity. One way to reduce ambiguity is to do as the MBE Board and Director did. The Board articulated its equity policy. The Director brought to the Board an interpretation of the policy which the Board subsequently approved.

This practice does not eliminate tension between boards and director, but it does reduce ambiguity and potential misunderstanding. The Director is still obligated to give the Board an account of her/his reasons for the decisions made. If the Board is dissatisfied with the Director's reasons, it can reprimand or dismiss the Director.

## Equity principles derived from comments:

I derived some 'equity principles' from my reading of the comments TDSB Trustees made about the scenarios that I feel deserve further discussion:

- Board programming should not be financially dependent on parental fund raising.
- Students should not be deprived of a program or support because their families do not have financial resources.
- The universal implementation of any program or service should make provision for the financial circumstances of the families whose students may be enrolled/involved.
- Specialized programs serving students whose families are financially challenged, racialized, newcomers to Canada, and Indigenous should be prioritized over programs intended to serve students whose families are not.

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- Programs conceived for the benefit of a specific sub-population of students (students from families challenged financially or Indigenous students) should make provision for the fact that, although sometimes clustered in a particular region, such students are often distributed throughout the district, albeit in smaller numbers.
- Criteria used for determining which students may enrol in programs or access supports should not exclude students without good reason.

These equity principles ,and perhaps others, deserve further discussion among TDSB Trustees using concrete examples from the district.

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**Board of Trustees****Board of Trustees – Part 1**

How well a Board can achieve its goals is determined by its bylaws, policies, and procedures. This section of the Self-Assessment Tool addressed many of the responsibilities of the TDSB Board. This section sought the appraisal of individual trustees of how well the Board carries out its many responsibilities. The data in the table below are ordered by the magnitude of the means. The scale values range from “not at all” which was assigned a value of 1 to “consistently well” which was assigned a value of 5 [“don’t know” was assigned no numerical value]. Boards naturally strive to carry out their responsibilities “consistently well.” Thus, higher scores signify better Board performance.

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	# Resp						Rating		Total Resp
	Consistently Well (5)	Well (4)	Adequately (3)	Poorly (2)	Not at All (1)	Don't Know (0)	Mean (↓)	SD	
<b>The Board of Trustees</b>									
approves budgets within the sustained fiscal limitations of the TDSB.	7	11	1	1	0	0	4.20	0.77	20
appoints an independent auditor to conduct an annual review of the TDSB's financial position.	12	5	2	1	0	1	4.19	1.29	21
protects privacy and maintains confidentiality.	8	6	5	1	0	0	4.05	0.94	20
advocates for the TDSB and the students it serves.	6	9	4	2	0	0	3.90	0.94	21
completed a board governance orientation program for the education sector after the most recent election.	5	8	6	2	0	0	3.76	0.94	21
directs the operational organization through and only through the Director of Education.	2	11	6	2	0	0	3.62	0.80	21
maintains relationships with external agencies and superordinate bodies.	3	9	7	2	0	0	3.62	0.86	21
advocates on behalf of the TDSB with outside bodies and senior government.	5	6	5	4	0	0	3.60	1.10	20
is responsible for protecting the interests, image, credibility, and financial viability of the TDSB.	3	7	10	1	0	0	3.57	0.81	21
approves the bargaining mandate for collective bargaining with unionized employees and the agreements reached with them.	4	7	9	0	0	1	3.57	1.12	21
regularly reviews Board policies.	5	5	7	4	0	0	3.52	1.08	21
has written policies defining the Board's work and how it will accomplish its work.	1	9	10	1	0	0	3.48	0.68	21
receives regular reports about student achievement and well-being.	4	6	7	4	0	0	3.48	1.03	21
ensures that all students receive the programs and services to which they have a right under provincial legislation.	2	11	5	2	0	1	3.48	1.12	21
acts in the best interest of the TDSB.	4	6	9	1	0	1	3.48	1.17	21

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	# Resp						Rating		
	Consistently Well (5)	Well (4)	Adequately (3)	Poorly (2)	Not at All (1)	Don't know (0)	Mean (↓)	SD	
The Board of Trustees									
evaluates the performance of the Director of Education.	4	9	0	5	3	0	3.29	1.42	21
has written policies defining the role of the Director of Education.	3	6	8	2	1	1	3.24	1.26	21
gives direction to the Director only by formal, recorded votes.	2	9	6	1	2	1	3.24	1.30	21
has written policies about the matters delegated to the Director of Education.	4	4	7	4	1	1	3.14	1.35	21
maintains a constructive two-way dialogue with students, employees, parents, and citizens as a means of engaging them in the work of the TDSB.	1	7	6	7	0	0	3.10	0.94	21
works collectively to instill public confidence in the TDSB.	1	5	9	6	0	0	3.05	0.86	21
puts the interests of the TDSB at the centre of the decision-making process.	1	6	8	5	1	0	3.05	0.97	21
spends more time on strategic planning than on immediate issues and problems.	2	4	9	5	1	0	3.05	1.02	21
informs the citizens of Toronto about the achievement and well-being of students.	3	4	6	7	1	0	3.05	1.16	21
reviews a range of alternatives before authorizing a course of action.	1	5	7	8	0	0	2.95	0.92	21
uses student achievement results to evaluate the performance of the organization.	1	5	5	8	1	0	2.85	1.04	20
has written policies that address the outcomes that TDSB students will achieve.	2	7	2	6	1	3	2.71	1.59	21
has a Board professional development plan.	0	4	6	5	2	4	2.19	1.40	21
evaluates its own performance on a regular basis.	0	2	2	12	4	1	2.00	0.95	21
approves the total compensation packages for all exempt employees of the TDSB.	1	3	4	2	2	8	1.75	1.74	20

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Only three responsibilities earned a score between “well” [4] and “consistently well” [5]: *approving budgets within the sustained fiscal limitations of the TDSB; appointing an independent auditor to conduct an annual review of the TDSB’s financial position; and protecting privacy and maintaining confidentiality. Advocating for the TDSB and the students it serves* earns a mean score of 3.9, marginally below “well” with the remaining items descending from there toward “adequately” and below. Beginning with the item *reviews a range of alternatives before authorizing a course of action*, the mean falls below “adequately.”

There are many things one might say about the data, but several stand out:

- Providing oversight of efforts to improve student achievement is the paramount responsibilities of school boards. It is thus surprising that the item “*uses student achievement results to evaluate the performance of the organization*” earned a mean response [2.85] below “adequately.” Student results are the major indicator of a Board’s effectiveness and of its accountability to the citizens of the district.
- Of concern – and related to the point above – is the mean response [2.71] for “*has written policies that address the outcomes that TDSB students will achieve.*” Written policies pertinent to the outcomes that students are intended to achieve informs the public about the Board’s goals, provides a focus for Board oversight, and signals to the system what the Board expects.
- It is equally concerning that “*reviews a range of alternatives before authorizing a course of action*” earns a score only marginally near “adequately” [2.95]. Evaluating a range of alternative permits the Board to consider how each alternative under consideration aligns with its goals as expressed in policy and in its strategic plan. It also allows the Board to consider whether it is possible to pursue a less expensive political or financial course of action to the same goal.
- The mean [2.19] for the item *has a Board professional development plan* and the fact that there are items to which Trustees said “don’t know” suggests that this is another responsibility that deserves the Board’s attention. The Board is encouraged to focus its program of professional development on how to set goals for student achievement and what to look for when the Board monitors student achievement.

Many of these observations were reflected in the open-ended comments made by Trustees. The dominant category was labelled *insufficient understanding of governance, poor governance culture, insufficient focus on strategic planning*. Several Trustees observed “*inconsistency amongst members of the board about what it means to be a Trustee.*” Part of the confusion was attributed to “*acting as an elected politician who prioritizes ‘getting noticed’ over the responsibilities of being a Trustee.*” The “poor governance culture” some Trustees perceived meant that “*the interests of students were not at the heart of Board decision making.*” The

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

absence of reports that describe the performance of students was explicitly mentioned in relation to Board performance. *"Time spent on strategic planning was minimal,"* coming at the expense of arguments about procedure. The *"inconsistent application of rules"* was attributed to what one Trustee described as *"white privilege."*

A second category of comments pertained to the *availability of information*. The primary sentiment expressed by the few Trustees whose comments were grouped under this heading was that information providing background to the issues before the Board was not forthcoming. The implication I drew from the comments was that there is lack of trust between the governors of the system and those charged with the administration and operation of the district.

One Trustee wrote a very *complimentary appraisal of the Board*. The comment called attention to the diversity among board members in terms of background and experience, the success the Board had in addressing budgetary challenges, despite the fact that more than half of the Board members were new Trustees. Another, however, wrote about experiencing greater *"racism on the Board"* than s/he had elsewhere, and a *"lack of respect among Board members"*.

Distrust impedes effective governance. Distrust in the TDSB is magnified by the fact that Trustees are elected in wards and see themselves as representing the residents of that ward. Trustees consider themselves politicians and have difficulty making the transition from politician to trustee. When Trustees act primarily as politicians who act on behalf of constituencies, rather than as members of a board responsible to all citizens, the 'best interests of the district' become confused with the 'best interests' of their constituents.

Perceived value differences is another, related, source of distrust. Commitment to one's constituents and opposition to the constituents of others is a force for thinking that the values and behaviours of the constituents of other Trustees are different from one's own constituents and are harmful to their interests. Competition for scarce resources exacerbates distrust.

Distrust among Trustees is 'managed' by their defined responsibilities and their code of conduct. The obligation of a Trustee to act in the best interest of the district, and to subordinate the Trustee's self interest and the interest of its constituents to the Board's best interest is an example of one of the mechanisms for managing conflict and distrust. Distrust is magnified when Trustees do not adhere to established procedure for resolving differences. When that happens, new negative norms are established, and dysfunction sets in.

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## Board of Trustees part 2

The Board's policies and code of conduct establish the boundaries for the expression of different values while pursuing the best interests of the district. This section sought the appraisal by individual trustees of how well the Board adheres to its code of conduct. The data in the table below are ordered by the magnitude of the means. The scale values range from "infrequently or not at all" which was assigned a value of 1 to "always" which was assigned a value of 4 ["don't know" was assigned no numerical value]. Thus, higher scores signify better Board performance.

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	# Resp					Rating		Total Resp
	Always (4)	Often (3)	Sometimes (2)	Infrequently or Not at All (1)	Don't know (0)	Mean	SD	
<b>The Board members</b>								
maintain confidentiality and protect privacy.	8	11	0	2	0	3.19	0.87	21
can fulfill their responsibilities under the School Act and still advocate for their wards.	5	11	4	1	0	2.95	0.80	21
can explain to their constituents the Board's obligation to act in the best interest of the TDSB.	4	10	7	0	0	2.86	0.73	21
understand the legislative and regulatory framework within which the Board must operate.	2	13	5	0	0	2.85	0.59	20
resist the temptation to give operational direction.	0	17	4	0	0	2.81	0.40	21
fully understand their role as Board members.	6	5	8	2	0	2.71	1.01	21
possess the confidence to chair Board or its Standing Committee meetings.	3	9	6	2	0	2.65	0.88	20
can explain and defend Board decisions with which they did not agree.	1	11	8	1	0	2.57	0.68	21
refer community members to the appropriate Board officials when they have encountered problems rather than trying to solve the problem themselves.	1	12	7	0	1	2.57	0.81	21
support decisions of the Board publicly even if they were not in favor of the decision.	0	13	6	2	0	2.52	0.68	21
arrive at meetings having read and thought about the items on the agenda.	2	8	10	1	0	2.52	0.75	21
understand the rules of procedure governing meetings.	2	8	10	1	0	2.52	0.75	21
can read and understand a school board financial statement.	3	9	6	2	1	2.52	1.03	21
avoid public criticism of one another.	2	9	6	4	0	2.43	0.93	21
employ evidence and logic in defending their perspectives on issues.	0	8	10	1	1	2.25	0.79	20
are comfortable saying publicly that they do not understand an issue.	2	6	9	3	1	2.24	1.00	21
can see issues from perspectives other than their own.	2	4	11	4	0	2.19	0.87	21
can voice their opinions and their perspectives at meetings without fear of being ostracized.	1	5	10	5	0	2.10	0.83	21
can tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty.	2	3	11	5	0	2.10	0.89	21



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	# Resp					Rating		Total Resp
	Always (4)	Often (3)	Sometimes (2)	Infrequently or Not at All (1)	Don't know (0)	Mean	SD	
<b>The Board members</b>								
do not allow differences of opinion and perspective to damage their relationships with colleagues on the Board.	0	4	11	6	0	1.90	0.70	21

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

The means for the items in the table above indicate that the Board complies with its policies less often than it should. Only one item achieves a mean rating above 3 “often”: *“maintain confidentiality and protect privacy.”* All the remaining items achieve ratings below “often.”

The lowest mean rating [1.9] was for the statement: *“the Board members do not allow differences of opinion and perspective to damage their relationships with colleagues on the Board.”* The ratings for this item are relatively tightly clustered. Most selected “sometimes,” only 4 selected “often,” and 6 said “infrequently or not at all.” The mechanisms for managing distrust among individuals with different perspective described briefly above are not working in the TDSB.

Three other items are closely related: *“tolerating ambiguity and uncertainty”* [2.1], *“seeing issues from perspectives other than their own”* [2.19], and *“voicing their opinions and their perspectives at meetings without fear of being ostracized”* [2.1].

There is much about which one might make observations based on the data contained in the table above, but I will focus on one that stands out for me.

- These results imply a significant level of distrust among trustees. One of the factors that impedes effective governance is distrust. It arises in part because Trustees pursue values that are different from those pursued by their fellow governors. Distrust is magnified by the partisan election process where each Trustee competes with every other Trustee for attention and votes. Attachment to one’s own values, and opposition - if not hostility - to the values of others, are conditions that make for distrust among political rivals.

Trustees cross the boundaries that are set to manage distrust when they perceive the benefit to themselves or their interests to outweigh the rewards for the district, such as reputational maintenance, avoidance of public conflict, the possibility of dismissal by the Ministry of Education. Under such circumstances, a trustee will choose to transgress the boundary by failing to “support decisions of the Board publicly even if they were not in favor of the decision” [2.57] and avoiding “*public criticism of one another*” [2.43] and sometimes attribute sinister motives to those in favour of the decision. Transgressions range from publicizing one’s opposition on social media to vilifying one’s opponents.

Trustee comments about this section of the Self-Assessment Tool were not entirely negative, though most were. One Trustee referred to an earlier comment in which s/he complimented the Trustees – especially ones that were new to the position - for having addressed well the budget challenges. Another said, notwithstanding the differences among Trustees, the Board *“makes decisions in the best interests of the system.”*

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

It was difficult to compose a category label for the negative comments that were made because they often included a number of issues. Several Trustees said that not all Trustees are comfortable “admitting they do not understand an issue” because they are unable to “see or understand the perspectives of others” whose “lived experience” may differ from their own. “Privilege” was asserted by several Trustees as the reason why it is difficult for some Trustees to listen to those whose experiences are different. One trustee seemed to sum up the sentiments of several other Trustees:

*There is a lack of collegiality. The Board is very divided because there is little respect for differences in opinions. Board members are not able to voice their opinions. Some fear ostracization, a situation that is made worse by racism.*

Another Trustee said that s/he perceived marginalization and intimidation to have occurred. Several Trustees used the term “culture of fear.” In one instance this seemed to have referred to reluctance to speak about issues that the Trustees have not “lived.” Another said the “culture of fear” resulted in some Trustees feeling pressured to vote in a particular way or to “admit they do not understand an issue, possess the background to understand a complex issue, or cannot read a financial statement.” These comments may also reflect the relatively low means score for: “arrive at meetings having read and thought about the items on the agenda” [2.52] “understand the rules of procedure governing meetings” [2.52] and “can read and understand a school board financial statement” [2.52]. These low scores mean that Trustees are breaching their duty of care, their obligation to discharge their responsibilities with the care, diligence, and skill that a reasonably prudent person would use if that person were in a comparable position.

One Trustee attributed the “culture of fear” to the inconsistent application of rules, making it “hard to know what the rules are.” Another Trustee said that disagreements about substantive matters are expressed as disrespect for the person with whom one disagrees.

*2019-2020 was quite a year for several trustees of the board. There were many who felt a sense of despair and that they did not belong. There were many forms of criticism. Some Trustees were not given a chance to express their thoughts or opinions, and some were treated as second class members of the board.*

There were comments that support the results in the table above:

- Board members coming unprepared for discussion because they had not read the material prior to the meeting.
- Inadequate preparation for making well-constructed motions.

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

- Failure to abide by the principle that once a decision of the collective Board is made, all trustees – including those who opposed the decision - will support the decision.
- Publicly criticizing a decision and attributing negative and sometimes sinister motives to those in favour of the decision.
- Trustees commenting negatively about the opinions or comments of other trustees and using social media to denigrate them.
- Implying or using race and racism to intimidate other trustees when there are differing opinions or it looks like the decision will not go the way they want.
- Using urgent motions to address matters that are not urgent, some of which seem intended to shame the Board into voting in favour of the motion.
- Giving operational direction to staff.

### Responsibilities of Board and Committee Chairs

This section of the instrument assessed the Board's beliefs about the responsibilities of the Board Chair and Vice Chair, and the responsibilities of the Chairs of the Board's standing committees. It was an appraisal of what **should be**, not what is or has been. The assessment presented each Trustee with a list of normative statements about what the Chair of the Board should do. Each statement was accompanied by a scale that ranged from "strongly disagree" (0) to "strongly agree" (4)

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

	# Resp					Rating		Total Resp
	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Don't Know (0)	Mean	SD (↑)	
<b>The Chair of the Board SHOULD</b>								
ensure that there is an annual summative evaluation of the Director of Education.	18	3	0	0	0	3.86	0.36	21
ensure that discussions of the Board are productive, efficient, and orderly.	17	4	0	0	0	3.81	0.40	21
represent the Board as its official spokesperson about Board official business as determined by the Board as a whole.	17	4	0	0	0	3.81	0.40	21
conduct Board meetings to ensure that they are focussed on issues within the Board's purview as set out in Board policy.	15	6	0	0	0	3.71	0.46	21
conduct debriefings and self-assessments with the Board and Director of Education on a timely basis to improve Board deliberations.	14	7	0	0	0	3.67	0.48	21
not exercise authority as an individual.	14	6	1	0	0	3.62	0.59	21
develop proposed agendas for Board meetings in cooperation with the Director of Education.	15	4	2	0	0	3.62	0.67	21
monitor the Board's actions to ensure the actions are consistent with the Board's policies and procedures.	14	6	0	1	0	3.57	0.75	21
execute all documents authorized by the Board, except as prescribed or proscribed by law.	15	5	0	0	1	3.57	0.93	21
not give direction to the Director of Education without Board authorization.	16	3	1	0	1	3.57	0.98	21
monitor the Board's actions to ensure that the actions comply with the Board's obligations to external and superordinate authorities.	10	9	1	0	1	3.29	0.96	21



## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

## Board Chair

Trustees were very clear about their expectations for the Board's Chair. There was substantial agreement [ 3.29] among Trustees that *"the Chair of the Board should monitor the Board's actions to ensure that the actions comply with the Board's obligations to external and superordinate authorities."* There was very strong agreement among Trustees that the Chair of the Board should: *"ensure that there is an annual summative evaluation of the Director of Education"* [3.86]; *"ensure that discussions of the Board are productive, efficient, and orderly"* [3.81]; and *"represent the Board as its official spokesperson about Board official business as determined by the Board as a whole"* [3.81].

A few Trustees said that the Board needs to respect the role of the Chair. One Trustee said that Trustees could show their respect by following the Board's code of conduct and not depending upon the Chair to maintain order. Another Trustee said, *"these statements are within the chair's jurisdiction, but others rely on the Board itself to respect the role of the Chair."* Trustees said that the relationship was reciprocal. The Chair needs to respect the Trustees.

*The chair needs to be consistent, fair, and open to listening to different perspectives. The Chair should not 'rule by 12.' The Chair needs to reach out and understand different positions. Chair should not show favouritism. Chair should not conspire with the Director or act as the Director's messenger. The role of the Chair is to represent the voices of the Trustees to the Director, not the other way around.*

One Trustee observed that the relationship between the Chair and Trustees can be easily compromised when Trustees feel that the Director and the Chair have conspired to ensure that a Committee or the board arrives at their preferred decision. Another suggested that establishing standing rules that place limitations on the speaking time allotted to Trustees as well as limitations on the number of times a Trustee may speak to an issue would be welcome. Such limitations would help to *"focus the mind"* and limit *"rambling."*

Two things are worth noting. First, the Board's by-laws address speaking time:

Speaking Time

*5.13.10 At Board, a member may speak only once to each motion and for up to five (5) minutes. A member, who moved the main motion, but not amendment, may speak a second time for up to three (3) minutes in order to close debate.*

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*5.13.11 At Committee, members may speak an unlimited number of times to each motion and for up to five (5) minutes for each motion. A member, who moves the motion, but not amendment, may speak last and for up to three (3) additional minutes to conclude debate.*

Second, without the active help of the entire Board it is very difficult for a Board Chair to satisfy Trustee expectations regarding the Chair's conduct.

Board Vice Chair

A set of statements like those about the Board's expectations for the Chair were presented to Trustees about the Vice-Chair position. The same four-point scale was also used.

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

	# Resp					Rating		Total Resp
	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Don't Know (0)	Mean	SD (↑)	
<b>The Vice Chair of the Board SHOULD</b>								
not exercise authority as an individual.	18	1	1	0	0	3.85	0.49	20
not give direction to the Director of Education without Board authorization.	16	4	0	0	0	3.80	0.41	20
ensure that discussions of the Board are productive, efficient, and orderly.	13	7	0	0	0	3.65	0.49	20
conduct Board meetings to ensure that they are focussed on issues within the Board's purview as set out in Board policy.	10	9	1	0	0	3.45	0.60	20
conduct debriefings and self-assessments with the Board and Director of Education on a timely basis to improve Board deliberations.	10	9	1	0	0	3.45	0.60	20
monitor the Board's actions to ensure the actions are consistent with the Board's policies and procedures.	10	9	0	1	0	3.40	0.75	20
monitor the Board's actions to ensure that the actions comply with the Board's obligations to external and superordinate authorities.	9	10	0	0	1	3.30	0.92	20
execute all documents authorized by the Board, except as prescribed or proscribed by law.	9	7	1	1	2	3.00	1.30	20

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

As was the case with expectations for the Chair, there was strong agreement among Trustees regarding expectations for the Vice-Chair. Trustees were less certain about the statement *“the Vice Chair of the Board should execute all documents authorized by the Board, except as prescribed or proscribed by law” [3.00]* than most of the other statements. The likely reason is that the Vice-Chair does not exercise such actions unless designated by the chair to do so in her/his absence.

Several Trustees made the point that the Vice-Chair’s responsibilities derive mainly from the tasks assigned by the Chair. This suggests a close working relationship between the two positions. The area for which the Vice-Chair has significant responsibility is in chairing the private sessions of the Board. In that context the Vice-Chair has the obligation to ensure that Trustee behaviour conforms with its policies and code of conduct. One Trustee suggested that the private sessions of the Board should be recorded if a Trustee wished to raise a code-related or policy-related concern.

## Chairs of Standing Committees

A set of statements like those about the Board’s expectations for the Chair and Vice-Chair were presented to Trustees about the chairs of Standing Committees. The same four-point scale was also used.

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

Response ID	# Resp					Rating		Total Resp
	Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Don't Know (0)	Mean	SD (↑)	
ensure that discussions of the Committee are productive, efficient, and orderly.	16	5	0	0	0	3.76	0.44	21
report in a regular and timely manner to the Board.	15	5	0	0	0	3.75	0.44	20
conduct Committee meetings to ensure that they are focused on issues within the Committee's purview as set out in Board policy.	15	4	1	0	0	3.70	0.57	20
not exercise authority as individuals.	13	7	0	0	0	3.65	0.49	20
monitor the Committee's actions to ensure the actions are consistent with Board and Committee policies and procedures.	13	6	1	1	0	3.48	0.81	21
conduct debriefings and self-assessments with Committee members on a timely basis to improve Committee deliberations.	11	8	0	0	1	3.40	0.94	20
not give direction to the Director of Education or any Board employee.	11	7	1	0	1	3.35	0.99	20
develop proposed agendas for Committee meetings in cooperation with the Board Chair.	7	7	3	1	3	2.67	1.39	21



## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

As was the case with expectations for the Chair and the Vice-Chair, there was strong agreement among Trustees regarding expectations for the Chairs of Standing Committees. Trustees were less certain about the statement “*the Chairs of Standing Committees develop proposed agendas for Committee meetings in cooperation with the Board Chair*” [2.67], likely because the usual practice in the TDSB is for the Chair of a standing committee to develop the agenda with the Director of Education. On the other hand, it is the Committee Chair in consultation with the Board Chair and the Director who determine when delegations are heard. The difference highlights for me the challenge that the Board Chair faces in coordinating the timing of issues coming to the Board.

Comments about this section of the Self-Assessment Tool were distributed among a range of topics. Concern was expressed about the overall effectiveness of standing committees. It was suggested that effectiveness could be improved if there were established terms of reference for the standing committees. The statement was a bit puzzling because the Board’s bylaws set out the following:

*4.6.3 The Finance, Budget and Enrolment Committee mandate will be to consider and make recommendations to the Board on finance matters, including procurement and contract awards, referred to it for consideration, review the impact of enrolment and policy change on the Board’s budget, including reviewing the impact of enrolment trends, and marketing strategies to bolster enrolment in declining areas of the city; and consider strategies to balance the capital and operating budget over a multi-year period, and to make recommendations to the Board to balance the annual capital and operating budget. The Committee will also consider facility related issues, including leases, plant operations, maintenance, architect selection and sketch plan approvals.*

*4.6.4 The Governance and Policy Committee’s mandate will be to consider and make recommendations to the Board on governance and policy matters referred to it for consideration, including review of Board governance practices and the ongoing development and review of the Board’s policies.*

*4.6.5 The Program and School Services Committee’s mandate will be to consider and make recommendations to the Board on education matters referred to it for consideration, including matters presented by the Board’s Community Advisory Committees.*

It may have been the case the Trustee making the comment was referring not to a mandate, but to a work plan for each committee.

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

There were several comments that referred to *“working closely with staff to ensure that questions were promptly answered, or motions acted upon”* or to *“make sure that staff are executing and implementing decisions that are made by the Board in a timely manner.”*

Although those who made the comments did not provide explanations, I inferred from these comments that some Trustees believed that it was necessary for them to ensure that staff were carrying out their responsibilities. The responsibility for ensuring that staff fulfill their responsibilities falls upon the Director of Education; such oversight is not the responsibility of an individual Trustee nor of the Board.

### Board Code of Conduct

Trustees were asked to consider statements drawn from the Board Code of Conduct and appraise the Board's adherence to the statements during the 2019-2020 school year. A scale similar to others used in the SAT was used for appraisal of the adherence of the Board to its code of conduct. The scale scores ranged from 1 (infrequently or not at all” to 4 (always). A value of 0 was assigned to “don’t know.”

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

Code Provision	# Resp					Rating		Total Resp
	Always (4)	Often (3)	Sometimes (2)	Infrequently or Not at All (1)	Don't Know (0)	Mean	SD (↑)	
No member of the Board may obtain personal financial gain from the use or sale of Board-developed intellectual property (e.g., inventions, creative writings and drawings), computer programs, technical innovations, or other items capable of being patented, since all such property remains exclusively that of the Board.	20	1	0	0	0	3.95	0.22	21
Members of the Board are expected to carry out their duties with impartiality and objectivity. Members must decline from accepting a gift, benefit, or hospitality because of the risk that this will compromise the objectivity of the member of the Board or lead to an appearance of lack of objectivity, bias, or influence on the part of the member.	18	3	0	0	0	3.86	0.36	21
Members of the Board shall serve and be seen to serve their school communities in a constructive, respectful, conscientious, and diligent manner.	18	2	1	0	0	3.81	0.51	21
Members of the Board shall recognize the public trust in the expenditure of TDSB funds efficiently and in the best interests of students.	16	5	0	0	0	3.76	0.44	21
Members of the Board should be committed to performing their functions with integrity and to avoiding the improper use of the influence of their office, and conflicts of interest, both apparent and real.	16	5	0	0	0	3.76	0.44	21
No member of the Board shall use the influence of his or her office for any purpose other than for the exercise of his or her official duties.	17	3	1	0	0	3.76	0.54	21
Transparency, accountability, and public confidence are fundamental components for the effective governance of school boards as public bodies responsible to their communities and to the provincial government. The conduct of the members of the Board of Trustees must be of the highest standard to maintain the confidence of the public.	18	1	2	0	0	3.76	0.62	21
No member of the Board shall undertake campaign-related activities on Board property unless permitted by Board policy.	18	2	0	0	1	3.71	0.90	21
Members of the Board shall seek to serve the public interest by upholding both the letter and the spirit of the laws of the Federal Parliament and Ontario Legislature, and the bylaws and policies adopted by the Board.	14	7	0	0	0	3.67	0.48	21

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

Code Provision	# Resp					Rating		Total Resp
	Always (4)	Often (3)	Sometimes (2)	Infrequently or Not at All (1)	Don't Know (0)	Mean	SD (↑)	
No member of the Board should use, or permit the use of Board staff members, Board events, Board facilities, Board funds, Board information, and Board infrastructure or other resources (e.g., Board-owned materials, websites, and social media platforms) for activities other than the business of the TDSB.	17	3	0	0	1	3.67	0.91	21
No member of the Board shall disclose or release by any means to any member of the public any confidential information acquired by virtue of their office, in either oral or written form, except when required by law or authorized by the Board to do so. This is a continuous obligation that extends beyond the member's term of office.	14	6	1	0	0	3.62	0.59	21
Members of the Board are expected to perform their duties in office and arrange their private affairs in a manner that promotes public confidence and will bear close public scrutiny.	13	7	1	0	0	3.57	0.60	21
No member of the Board shall use the facilities, equipment, supplies, services or other resources of the Board (including newsletters, social media sites and websites linked through the Board's website, contact information including email addresses obtained as a result of the member's performance of his or her duties as a Trustee) for any election campaign or campaign-related activities.	17	2	0	1	1	3.57	1.08	21
No member of the Board shall use the services of persons for election-related purposes during hours in which those persons receive any compensation from the Board.	18	1	0	0	2	3.57	1.21	21
Members of the Board should not access or attempt to gain access to confidential information in the custody of the Board unless it is necessary for the performance of their duties and not prohibited by Board policy.	15	3	1	1	1	3.43	1.12	21

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

All responses in the code of conduct section earned ratings between 3 (often) and 4 (always). There were six “don’t knows,” indicating that knowledge of the code of conduct and/or its application was not uniformly shared among Trustees. Trustees commented that the code of conduct is clear, but not all Trustees understand the code of conduct. One Trustee admitted that s/he had not read the entire document but supported the application of the norms the code was intended to ensure. The application of the norms was not clear to all Trustees. One Trustee wrote *“there are grey areas that need to be better defined”* (use of social media and data were among those mentioned).

Conduct issues arising among Trustees were said to have arisen from two main causes. One was *“deep-rooted trust issues”* prompted by *“issues of confidentiality.”* The other was *“extreme exhaustion brought on by very long hours, seven days a week, that have gone on for months and months”* due to the Pandemic.

## Values and Goals of the Board

This section of the assessment is intended to reveal the different priorities that trustees place on the values and goals expressed in Board policy.

### Values

Even when they share the same values, people differ in the relative priority they place on the values they hold. The Board’s Mission Statement includes eight values. Trustees were asked to rank the values below from 1 (most important to you) to 8 (least important to you). The text [in brackets] was added by the consultant to better render the phrases into value statements.



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Values: The TDSB	# Resp								Rank		Total Resp
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Mean (↑)	SD	
[takes pride in] the commitment and skills of our staff.	0	0	1	2	0	4	7	6	6.60	1.47	20
[fosters] a partnership of students, staff, family, and community.	0	2	0	6	3	6	3	0	5.00	1.49	20
[is or seeks to be] a strong public education system.	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	11	4.90	3.52	20
[provides] learning and working spaces that are inclusive, caring, safe, respectful, and environmentally sustainable.	2	0	5	5	2	5	1	0	4.20	1.67	20
[fosters] shared leadership that builds trust, supports effective practices, and enhances high expectations.	3	3	3	0	5	3	2	1	4.15	2.21	20
[is known for] equity, innovation, accountability, and accessibility.	1	5	3	5	2	0	4	0	3.90	1.92	20
[supports] the diversity of our students, staff, and our community.	1	6	5	0	5	1	1	1	3.70	1.92	20
[attempts to meet] each and every student's interests, strengths, passions, identities, and needs.	5	3	3	2	3	1	2	1	3.55	2.26	20

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

The dispersion of responses is worthy of mention. For the statement *“the TDSB [attempts to meet] each and every student’s interests, strengths, passions, identities, and needs”* where the mean response was 3.55, approximately 13 of the 20 Trustees responding to this section would be expected to fall within a range indicated by the standard deviation (SD) – that is, from 1.29 to 5.81. In everyday speech, one would say, *“Trustees are all over the map [the range from 1 to 8] on most items.”* Looking closely at the distribution for the item *“The TDSB [is or seeks to be] a strong public education system,”* one can see extreme polarization. Nine trustees assigned a value of one or two to the statement, ranking it high, but 11 of the 20 Trustees responding to the item ranked it at the bottom (8).

Trustees are not seeing the item *“the TDSB [is or seeks to be] a strong public education system”* through the same lens. It may be a semantic difference. Some Trustees may have read the item placing emphasis on the word “seeks” while the others may have placed emphasis on “is.” The fact that the values – even with the additional words to help understanding – are quite vague is an impediment to understanding and application.

In their comments, Trustees noted that imprecision of the value statements and the apparent overlap among them because they are vague. One Trustee seemed to speak for several others: *“we should refine and modernize our values, making them clearer.”* *“Carrying out this exercise makes me realize that we need to re-word our value system, wrote another.”* The sentiment that seemed most dominant is that the values deserved, at the least, to be re-examined.

Some Trustees noted the connections they saw among the statements and questioned the value in prioritizing values. Most, however, focused on equity, diversity, and inclusion. Several said that equity was among the most important – if not the most important – value. Some asserted that *“there are many marginalized and racialized communities in our city that believe with good reason that the TDSB only pays lip service to equity and inclusion.”* Another said, *equity is most important, but without the redistribution of power, equity, accountability, and innovation cannot be achieved.”* One Trustee saw the public perception of the Board as something different from student success, rather than seeing the two inextricably connected.

Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

**Goals**

The Board has several goals, including those set out in the Multi-Year Strategic Plan. Trustees were asked to evaluate how well the Board is working toward the realization of each goal below.

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	# Resp						Rating		Total Resp
	Consistently Well (5)	Well (4)	Adequately (3)	Poorly (2)	Not at All (1)	Don't Know (0)	Mean	SD (↑)	
<b>Goal: The Board works to</b>									
advocate on behalf of the TDSB and the communities it serves.	5	2	10	3	0	0	3.45	1.05	20
allocate human and financial resources strategically to support student needs.	2	7	6	4	0	0	3.37	0.96	19
create a culture for student and staff well-being.	1	9	6	4	0	0	3.35	0.88	20
transform student learning.	0	12	3	4	0	1	3.25	1.12	20
build strong relationships and partnerships within school communities to support student learning and well-being.	1	7	7	5	0	0	3.20	0.89	20
provide equity of access to learning opportunities for all students.	1	3	10	5	1	0	2.90	0.91	20

## Toronto District School Board: Results of the Self-Assessment Tool

The overall appraisal of how well the Board works to achieve the goals included in the table above was slightly better than “adequately,” except for “*providing equity of access to learning opportunities for all students*” which fell slightly below “adequately.” “Adequately” may be an accurate appraisal of the Boards efforts in each of these areas. However, the vacuity of these statements makes the reader wonder about their meaning.

This section elicited many comments. One group of comments addressed: inequities in the distribution of programming and resources; the failure to reach more vulnerable students; and the failure to transform student learning. Trustees expressed the view that the TDSB served its affluent and organized communities very well, evidenced by “*the abundant amount of unique and varied specialty school programs available in those areas.*” Another wrote, “*many learning opportunities are not open to all.*” “*More effort is needed to support communities where disparities and inequities are visible.*”

*I have heard about this so-called transformation of student learning and it is just a statement. I do not know if it has any meaning, substance, or impact beyond someone saying it... I have yet to see how the TDSB is transforming learning.*

Trustees had a variety of diagnoses for [in]adequacy of the Boards work. There is: insufficient focus on students; too much effort is devoted to responding to requests rather than addressing needs; disconnection between board decisions and what occurs in schools. “*There is a lot of navel-gazing and more focus on policing each other than focusing on student learning,*” wrote one Trustee.

*The deep disparities in our city are reproduced and reflected in our schools. The placement of special programs such as French Immersion is indicative of the disparities. There is a culture of filling a demand as opposed to cultivating a culture of learning to expand demand. Covid-19 has made the digital divide more obvious; with obvious socio-economic differences among those choosing online versus bricks and mortar school. Human and financial resources need to be more strategically allocated. The city is socio-economically diverse and a plan that covers everyone does not count for this--we need a differentiated approach.*

Another said that one facet of the problem was the tendency on the part of some to “*put the ward before the Board.*”

*Trustees advocate too much for their own communities. They ignore the TDSB in favour of the communities who vote for them. As a trustee you must be*



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*prepared to make some hard decisions that will benefit the Board as a whole  
and, sometimes, not your community.*

**Summary Statement**

The TDSB Board appears to have risen above the level of dysfunction described by Hall and Wilson. Despite general agreement among Trustees regarding the responsibilities of office, the roles of the Board's officers, the norms established in the Board's code of conduct, their beliefs about education, and the meaning of equity, there is much work to be done to achieve the cooperation essential to effective governance.

First and foremost, The Board must attend more assiduously to its principal obligations: improving student achievement, reducing inequalities, and improving public confidence in the TDSB. To accomplish this, Trustees will need to see beyond the horizon of the interests of their immediate constituencies to act in the best interest of the district, to depersonalize their differences, and to treat one another with the respect that every human being deserves.