



COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)
Report No. 19-081

17 September 2019

Update on the Identity-based Data Collection Project

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PURPOSE:

1. To provide an update on the Identity-based Data Collection project, including the student and community focus group meetings and the proposed plan and timelines for data collection, analysis and reporting.

CONTEXT:

2. The OCDSB has a strong commitment to improving equity of access and opportunity for all students. In 2011, the OCDSB undertook a comprehensive student survey “snapshot” in time. Since then, our community has expressed strong interest in formalizing a process for the ongoing collection of identity based data as a tool to better understand and eliminate systemic barriers. With the introduction of the *Equity Action Plan* (2014), and the subsequent enactment of the *Ontario Anti-Racism Act* (2017), a framework for school districts to move forward with this work is now in place. The *Act*, which applies to all publicly-funded institutions, specifically acknowledges four groups that are most adversely impacted by racism, including Indigenous, Black, Jewish communities, and communities that are adversely impacted by Islamophobia. Standards for the collection of identity-based data by public sector institutions in Ontario are described in detail in the *Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism* (see Appendix A for a summary of the standards).
3. In May 2018, the Ministry of Education released the *Ontario Education Equity Action Plan*, which outlines the provincial framework for identifying and eliminating discriminatory practices and systemic barriers and bias from Ontario schools and classrooms. The *Equity Action Plan* has four main areas:
 - School and Classroom Practices
 - Leadership, Governance and Human Resource Practices
 - Data Collection, Integration and Reporting
 - Organizational Culture Change

Work is planned or underway in all of these areas at the OCDSB, but the focus of this report is on the collection, integration and reporting of data.

4. Over the last two years, the OCDSB has been working with the Education Equity Secretariat and other districts to develop standards of practice for data collection by school boards in Ontario. In 2018-2019, the District applied for and received funding through the Secretariat to build capacity in preparation for the collection, analysis and use of identity-based data. The funding was in support of the first phase of the data collection project - undertaking focus groups with community partners, parents, and students to better understand lived experiences and how the collection of identity-based data might help to identify strategies to overcome barriers. The focus group sessions were held in the spring of 2019 and were very useful in informing our work. The second phase of the data collection project is the administration of a survey which will collect demographic and perceptual data for all students in the system. The survey will be undertaken in late November/early December 2019.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

Community Partners and Focus Group Sessions

5. The insight of our community partners was a critical starting point for planning the Focus Group Sessions. In May 2019, the OCDSB invited participation from a range of community partner groups and agencies to discuss strategies for the structure, participation and feedback of the focus group sessions; 44 community members attended the two meetings. The input of our partners helped to develop the plans for focus groups with students and parents of students who have experienced racism, bias, or barriers, including anti-Black racism, anti-Indigeneity, anti-Semitism, Homophobia, Islamophobia, Transphobia, Poverty/Classism, and Ableism/Disabilities.

Focus Groups and Findings

6. Based on the input from our community partners, separate focus groups were held for participants who identified from our Indigenous community and those from other equity seeking groups. Through May and June, two focus group sessions were held for students and three focus group sessions were held for parents. We were fortunate to have participation from approximately 60 students and 147 parents.
7. The focus group discussions were very powerful. Participants shared their experiences about racism, bias, and gaps that exist in the system. Five themes emerged in the discussions:
 - **The Importance of Identity** – participants discussed the complexity of identity; the sense of community that arises from identity; the risks of stereotyping associated with identity; and the very personal nature of the journey of how we define our identity;

- **Staff Awareness** – participants acknowledged the need for better staff awareness and capacity to supporting issues of identity; concern was expressed about the risk of learning expectations being established based on identity rather than capacity; and the need to balance engaging students identity in the classroom and expecting the students to be a knowledge expert on the history and culture of their identity;
- **Programming for Students** – participants discussed the importance of relevant programming for students; access to programming and resources; and the need to ensure that where specific learning needs are identified and documented, such as in an IEP, those needs are addressed in the classroom;
- **Representation** – participants addressed the importance and value of having an OCDSB workforce that is representative of the students in our classrooms; in addition, they discussed the importance of having learning resources which include and reflect the identities of our students;
- **Connectedness** – participants discussed the importance of ensuring opportunities for students/communities to connect, and acknowledged the value of forums such as the Black Youth Forum, the Indigenous Youth Day, Date for Diversity, and the Rainbow Youth Forum to create awareness and a sense of belonging.

These discussions reaffirmed how much identity matters in student learning and well-being and why it is so important that we allow students to engage in opportunities to address the experience of their identity. The focus groups discussions identified the following top five actions the OCDSB needs to take:

- i. **Acknowledge** that racism and bias exist in the education system;
- ii. **Listen** to what our parents, students, staff and community partners are telling us;
- iii. **Gain an understanding** of the values that shape students' identity;
- iv. **Increase representation** of diverse groups in staff to promote a greater sense of belonging for students; and
- v. **Be sensitive** in the data collection and reporting so as not to reinforce stereotypes.

The information collected from focus groups has helped the District better understand the disparities, biases, and gaps that exist in the system. This information is being used to help shape the data collection process, but also to develop our system capacity to support student learning and well-being.

Follow up with Community

8. The follow-up and feedback with participants and community partners is critical. Recognizing that participants have different needs, two summary documents have been created from the focus group sessions:

- Appendix B is a graphic summary of the feedback learned from the focus group discussions; and

- Appendix C is a detailed report of the sessions and the feedback received.

These documents will be shared with all participants electronically and posted on the District website. They will also be used to update our Advisory Committees. In addition, a follow-up meeting will be held with community partners to reflect on the feedback and discuss strategies to engage the community in the next stage of our data collection project.

Using Data to Address these Issues

9. In November 2019, the District will undertake the collection of voluntary demographic and perceptual data for all students (K-12). This includes questions about race, gender identity, ethnicity, language and sexual orientation. This type of data, when analyzed with other data sets can be very helpful in revealing trends which could help to answer questions about:
 - **Achievement Gaps** – whether certain groups of students achieve at the same rate;
 - **Suspension and Expulsion Rates** – whether certain groups of students are suspended or expelled at a higher rate;
 - **Streaming** – whether certain groups of students are over or under represented in particular programs or streams (academic versus applied; English with Core French or Elementary French Immersion);
 - **Sense of Belonging** - whether certain groups of students feel more engaged/disengaged at school;
 - **Feeling Safe at School** – whether certain groups of students feel more or less safe at school.

Data collection has the potential to inform the development of strategies to address such trends and to support the decision-making process. However, we must carefully plan for the ethical and focused collection and use of the data. The purpose of the student survey is:

- a. to gather demographic information about the unique and diverse characteristics of the OCDSB's student population;
- b. to identify and respond to barriers to student learning and well-being;
- c. to enhance the District's capacity to serve its increasingly diverse student population and client communities.

Survey Development and Planning for Analysis

10. The data collection process will be done by survey during the period November 26 to December 13, 2019. The key project timelines are attached in Appendix D. For students in Kindergarten through Grade 6, parents will be invited to complete one survey per child. Students in grades 7-12 will be invited to complete the survey in school during class time. The survey will be conducted electronically, using a direct email link, hard copies will be made available as required to accommodate individual requests.

11. This is a voluntary survey which means that individuals will be able to opt out of survey completion entirely or opt out of specific questions. For students in Kindergarten through grade 6, parents will receive information about the survey and a link to complete it on behalf of their child(ren). For students in grades 7 through 12, parents will be sent a letter with an opt-out consent form. Students in grades 7 through 12 who have consent, will still have the ability to opt out of the survey in its entirety or omit any individual questions if they choose.
12. The survey will be confidential, but not anonymous. School staff will not have access to the individual student responses and the data will be stored in a separate database. There will be a unique identifier on the survey data which will allow the research staff doing the analysis to link and analyze the survey data with other data sets (e.g., achievement data, suspension data, course participation rates, etc.). This will be done with data which is stripped of student identifiers (student name, OEN, address) and will only be reported on in aggregate numbers.

Survey Questions

13. Research staff has been reviewing the provincial Data Standards and sample survey questions used previously by the OCDSB, by other school districts, and those developed by the provincial working group. Using the input received from the focus group sessions and from our advisory committees and community members over the last year, a list of questions is being developed for our survey.

The regulations under the Anti-Racism Act, establish a framework for the order and nature of questions relating to personal information.

- Indigenous Identity
- Race
- Ethnic origin
- Religion
- Age
- Sex
- Education
- Geospatial information, such as postal code for place of residence, or place of work
- Socio-economic information, such as educational level, annual income, employment status, occupation, or housing status
- Citizenship
- Immigration status
- Gender identity and gender expression
- Sexual orientation
- Place of birth
- Languages
- Marital status •
- Family status
- (Dis)abilities

These types of personal information may be relevant for analyzing systemic racial inequalities in outcomes by considering the intersection of race with other social identities. The information may also support a better understanding of the factors that potentially contribute to, reinforce, or underlie systemic racial inequalities in outcomes.

Applying OCAP Principles

14. In our discussions with the community and with the Indigenous Education Advisory Committee, questions were raised about the application of the First Nations principles of ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP). In response to these concerns, several members of the research staff have recently completed a program offered by the First Nations Information Governance Centre in partnership with Algonquin College that provides a comprehensive overview of the principles. We will be continuing to work with the Indigenous community on the application of these principles to our work.

Data Integrity

15. Data integrity is a critical component in the planning phase. To ensure the secure and efficient collection of data, the District undertook a request for proposal for data collection software and selected Qualtrics as the preferred platform. The Qualtrics research platform provides organizations with a secure online collection and reporting tool that encrypts data during transmission and at rest, stores data on Canadian servers, and is accessible only to authorized users at the District. An implementation team from Qualtrics has been assigned to work with READ staff on this project.

The system also provides a mechanism for direct communication with survey respondents which will be particularly useful in ensuring that responses from survey participants can be linked to other administrative data once it has been collected.

Information letters for parents will be translated into the most common languages in the District, as indicated in Trillium. The Qualtrics research platform also has embedded translation capabilities that will allow respondents to translate questions into a language other than English should they require this additional support. All responses are converted to English in the final data set that is produced for analysis.

System Readiness and Support

16. In order to support implementation of the Identity Based Survey, superintendents, principals and managers will be engaging in the facilitated completion of two modules developed in partnership with the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI) in October. The two modules are Diversity and Inclusion Fundamentals and Unconscious Bias. The logistics and operational aspects of survey delivery will be a focus for the October Operations meeting. Schools will

receive ongoing support from the Research, Evaluation and Analytics Division as well as the central Equity and Indigenous Education teams. Fact sheets, question and answer documents and other resources will also be made available.

Reporting

17. It is anticipated that preliminary reporting of results from the collection of identity-based data will begin in late spring of 2020 with a summary of what we heard from our students and parents (on behalf of their child). Linkages to student achievement outcomes will begin to be incorporated in reports that are already being produced beginning with the 2019-2020 Annual Student Achievement Report to be available in the fall of 2020. Identification of new reports to be generated and timelines associated with those has yet to be determined.

On a move forward basis, a decision will need to be made as to the frequency of the survey cycle. The Toronto District School Board, which currently has the longest history of conducting such surveys, operates on a five-year cycle. Anything less than a three-year cycle is not sustainable.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

18. The District has received \$103,000 in one-time funding through a Transfer Payment Agreement to support this work to the end of November 2019. Funds were to be used to hire research staff, with the balance allocated towards meeting costs associated with the conduct of focus groups. The Ministry of Education has recently announced availability of up to \$50,000 in additional funds to continue to support this work through August 2020 through an application process. Any requirement for additional staff to support this important work on a more regular basis will be brought to Board as part of the budget process.
19. The District has also invested in the software that will be used to support the data collection for this project. The software also offers capabilities to generate reports and dashboards, making it a versatile tool for other initiatives within the District. Annual licensing fees are approximately \$120,000 and have been absorbed by the READ operating budget, which includes approximately \$60,000 from the MISA Local Capacity Building budget allocation in the GSNs.

COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

20. Collecting personal information about race and ethnicity is sensitive work. It is essential that all employees involved in the collection and use of the data have a fulsome understanding of the importance, value and sensitivity of the work and the purpose of collection and use. Our focus is to build a communication and awareness campaign that is respectful, culturally sensitive,

transparent and done in an accessible way that ensures individual privacy and confidentiality.

Our collaboration with community partner organizations has been critical to creating a sense of community support, and will continue to play a key role in our work moving forward. Our next meeting with community partner organizations will focus on strategies to support outreach and participation in the survey process. Staff continues to reach out to our advisory committees and key community members/partners for advice/guidance on such things as: implementation/communication strategies; and, analysis, interpretation and reporting that aligns with the Data Standards while balancing the needs of each community/equity-seeking group.

21. A detailed communications plan is underway. The focus of communication activities in September will be to report out on the focus group sessions and build awareness of the identity based data collection process with key stakeholder groups. In October, more detailed communications will begin which will focus on building awareness of the purpose of data collection process, the timing and operational details of the survey process and how to get more detailed information. In addition, training will be provided to build capacity of school based staff -to support students and families in the survey process. In late October/early November, the communication will be more focused on timing, consent, and how to participate. In December, communication will be focused on reminders for survey completion and thank you to all participants.
22. A variety of strategies will be used to ensure communications reach all of our different audiences, including:
 - a) **Print** – posters for schools and pamphlets/brochures for parents, school staff, community members and school councils to create awareness throughout the system;
 - b) **Digital** – online visuals and digital information to be available on the District and school websites and in social media, as well as direct emails, school council newsletters and Keeping You Connected;
 - c) **Promotional videos** featuring student and parent voice; and
 - d) **Face-to-face opportunities** to discuss plans (e.g., superintendency meetings, Student Senate, pop-up forums).

An important area of focus in the coming weeks will be strategies to support and engage students and parents who may need assistance/support with language and/or translation, or with access to technology or guided assistance for survey completion. We will continue to reach out to community partners, MLO's, and school based staff to develop strategies to support this work.

STRATEGIC LINKS:

23. This work is a critical step in our strategic commitment to identify and remove barriers and ensure equity of access and opportunity for all students. Our commitment to equity and the data collection work happens at the system level, but the impact on our work will be to positively impact the student experience in the classroom and at school.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How can the information learned from the focus groups inform the discussions and decision-making of the Board?
2. How will the collection of identity based data inform the work of the Board?
3. How can trustees support and encourage parent and student participation in the survey collection process?
4. What specific information or resource materials would assist in this regard?

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Camille Williams-Taylor
Director of Education/Secretary of the Board

Identity Based Data Collection – Overview and Standards

- The Research, Evaluation, Analytics and Data Division is responsible for identity based data collection at the OCDSB;
- Work on identity based data is governed by the Anti-Racism Act and the Data Standards issued by the Province of Ontario for all public sector organizations. The Act seeks to eliminate systemic racism and advance racial equity supports and acknowledges four groups that are most adversely impacted by racism, including Indigenous, Black, and Jewish communities, and communities that are adversely impacted by Islamophobia.
- The Act requires the Province to set targets within 12 months of the adoption of the Act (May 2018). Such targets may inform our work/responsibilities, but are not yet available.
- The district submitted a grant application to the Education Equity Secretariat of the Ministry of Education last year. The grant application sought funding for two things – some readiness work on data infrastructure and a qualitative research project to engage in conversations with the community to better understand lived experiences in our schools regarding systemic racism. This work was considered an important first step in seeking community input to help inform thinking about how the collection of identity based data could help to overcome systemic racism.
- The grant application was initially approved by the Ministry; however, funding was delayed and only recently became available. The Division has been continuing with this work within existing resources.
- The data standards include requirements that the school board must follow; rationale for each standard; and Guidance about exemplary practices. The standards cover 7 areas- see reverse.
- The current focus of our work is capacity building in terms of understanding the data standards. Data standards 1-5 emphasize the importance of organizational planning and readiness prior to any data collection. This includes identification of organizational objectives, responsibilities, training on both anti-racism and responsibilities under the Anti-Racism Act, data governance and organizational needs assessment.
- Some organizational readiness work must occur before community consultation and some is achieved based on what is learned from the community.
- Community consultation, modelled on the grant proposal, is proposed for Spring 2019. Between now and then, staff will be working on the following:
 - Data standards knowledge and capacity building;
 - Liaison with other school districts and public sector organizations;
 - Establishing a group of community agency partners that can inform our work;
 - Work with ACE and IEAC will continue to be consulted as regular advisory bodies to the district;
- Planning and preparation for data collection would occur between March and June 2019;
- Identity Based Data Collection planned for fall of 2019; methodology to be determined (ie at registration, as a census, etc).

Overview of the Data Standards

1. Assess, Plan and Prepare
 - Identify need and establish specific organizational objectives for personal information collection based on stakeholder and community input.
 - Determine organizational priorities and resources and conduct a privacy impact assessment.
 - Identify meaningful policy, program, or service delivery outcomes, and establish an analysis plan.
 - Establish data governance processes and develop and plan collection policies and procedures, including measures related to quality assurance and security of personal information.
 - Identify training needs and develop and deliver appropriate training and other resources to support compliance with the ARA, the regulations and the Standards, and relevant privacy legislation.
2. Collect Personal Information
 - Communicate the purpose and manner of personal information collection to clients and communities.
 - Implement the collection of personal information based on voluntary express consent.
2. Manage and Protect Personal Information
 - Implement processes for quality assurance and the security of personal information.
 - Maintain and promote secure systems and processes for retaining, storing, and disposing of personal information.
 - Limit access to and use of personal information
4. Analyse the Information Collected
 - Calculate and interpret racial disproportionality or disparity statistics.
 - Apply thresholds and interpret whether notable differences exist that require further analysis and/or remedial action.
5. Release of Data and Results of Analysis to the Public
 - De-identify data sets and results of analyses before making information public, consistent with Open Government principles.
 - Include results of racial disproportionalities or disparities in the reports to the public, along with thresholds used.
6. Support and Promote Anti-Racism Organizational Change
 - Use information to better understand racial inequities, and to inform evidence-based decisions to remove systemic barriers and advance racial equity.
 - Continue to monitor and evaluate progress and outcomes.
 - Promote public education and engagement about anti-racism.

7. Participant Observer Information (POI)
 - Plan to collect, manage and use POI with input from affected communities and stakeholders.
 - Implement the collection of POI according to requirements for indirect collection.
 - Have measures in place to ensure the accuracy of POI before use.



Identity-Based Data Collection

Input from Our Communities

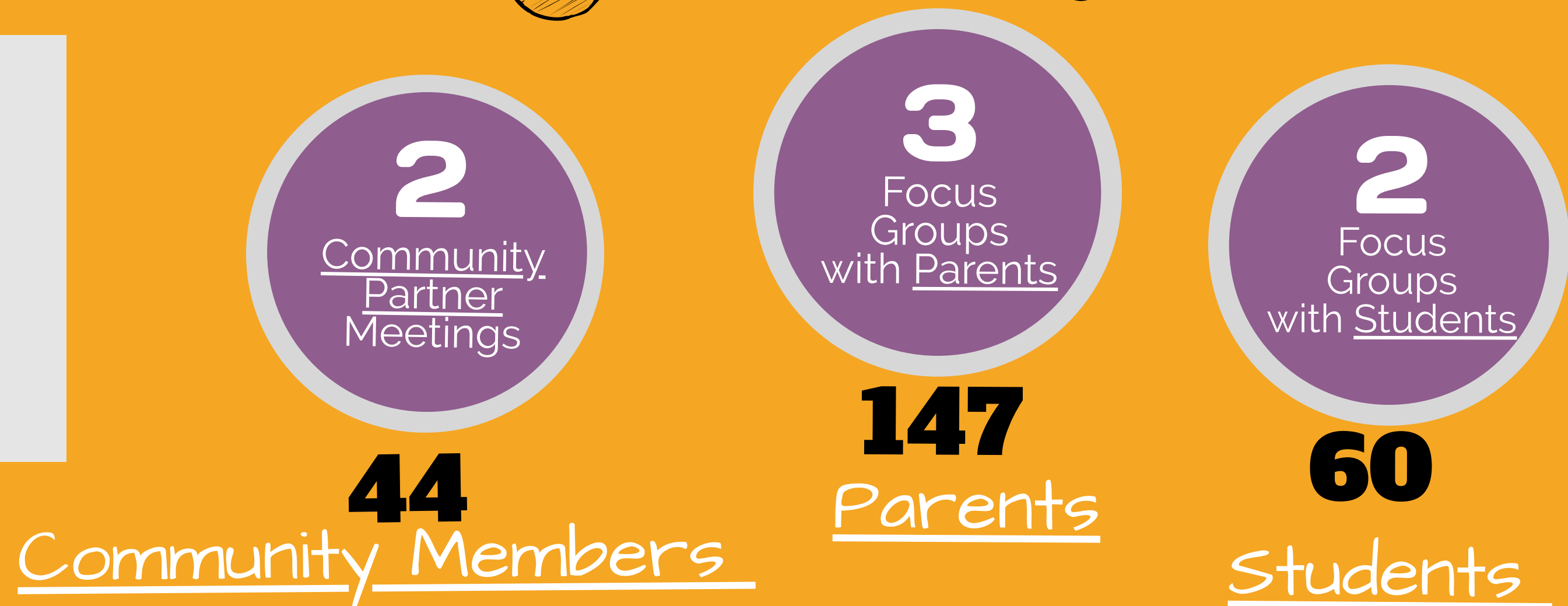


OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE?

to gather information that will help the District identify and monitor systemic barriers and identity-based disparities within the education system.

WHAT DID WE DO?



WHAT DID WE HEAR?

REPRESENTATION

"...schools are doing a superficial level. The data shows that 43% of students are members of racial groups but only 8% is staff. On an international day, Caucasian teachers represent different nations, which is funny. Hiring practices are keeping the school board "white."

CONNECTEDNESS

"..club and sports activities and, cultural celebrations are great opportunities to help us connect with friends who identify like us and increase our sense of belonging."

PROGRAMMING FOR STUDENTS

"My child was diagnosed with Dyspraxia- lots of work done to identify and then nothing happens after that."

STAFF AWARENESS

"Opportunities that were open to me when teachers thought I was White have now been closed. Now that people know I am Indigenous, teachers expect me to only work on Indigenous topics and issues. Being Indigenous is treated like a disability."

THE IMPORTANCE OF IDENTITY

"Identity is complex - it puts you into a community but emphasises your individuality."

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

Acknowledge
that racism and bias exist in the education system

Increase
representation of diverse groups in staff to promote greater sense of belonging for students

Identity Matters!

Allow students to engage in opportunities to address experience of identity

Listen
to what our parents, students, and community partners are telling us

Gain
understanding of values that shape students' identity

Be Sensitive
in the data collection and reporting so as not to reinforce stereotypes

WHAT IS NEXT?

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER
2019

Feedback to community and input for future plans

OCTOBER - NOVEMBER
2019

Communication with schools, parents, and communities
Pilot administration

NOVEMBER 26 -
DECEMBER 13

Survey administration

DECEMBER 2019-
JANUARY 2020

Distribution of Thank-you notes

JANUARY - APRIL
2020

Data analysis
Stakeholder consultations

MAY 2020

Release of preliminary results



Focus Groups with Students and Parents

Summary Report of Findings

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Context

In 2017, the Province enacted the Anti-Racism Act and provided a framework for school boards in Ontario to collect identity-based data. The purpose of the Act is to identify systemic barriers and biases to help advance racial equity for all students. The Act specifically identified four groups that are adversely impacted by racism including Indigenous, Black, Jewish communities, and communities that are adversely impacted by Islamophobia. The OCDSB has added LGBTQ2S+, New Comers, Poverty, and Accessibility groups to align with the current strategic direction.

The Ontario Education Equity Secretariat in the Ministry of Education has worked with staff from several school districts across the province to plan for province-wide collection of identity-based data. Collecting identity-based data is aimed at helping districts to precisely identify systemic barriers and help with strategies on how to eliminate discriminatory biases in order to support equity in student achievement and well-being. Consequently, on 4 February 2019, Report No. 19-019 on the Identity-Based Data Collection was presented to Committee of the Whole that described the work to be undertaken by the OCDSB to support the collection of identity-based data for all students K-12.

Equity in education is crucial in terms of improving all students' academic achievement and well-being as set out in *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan* (2017). As defined in *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation*, (Ministry of Education, 2014), an equitable educational environment provides a welcoming and respectful environment for all students. Further, the guidelines indicate that an equitable and inclusive education system also supports and inspires each student to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning. Following this lead, the OCDSB 2019-2023 strategic plan reinforces and supports an equitable education environment for all students.

“Opportunities that were open to me when teachers thought I was White have now been closed. Now that people know I am Indigenous, teachers expect me to only work on Indigenous topics and issues. Being Indigenous is treated like a disability.”

According to *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan* (2017), the diversity of the students in Ontario should be reflected in the diversity of their educators including teachers, school administrators, and school system leaders. Several students who participated in our focus groups reiterated the need to see staff members with similar identities as themselves. In a recent study examining the lived experiences of disengaged First Nations youth from schools, Walker (2019) highlights the importance of cross-cultural staff training to increase the understanding related to cultural norms of others. Recently, the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO, 2016) held forums with immigrant and refugee parents who expressed that they would like to see a welcoming, inclusive and engaging environment, clear and accessible communications, knowledge of what the curriculum entails, and a clear understanding of values and cultures being taught to their children.

In order to promote a safe and welcoming environment, information garnered from the collection of identity-based data will allow the OCDSB to identify and take action to eliminate systemic barriers faced by students in our school district.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to summarize what was shared during the focus group discussions with students and parents with a view to using the information to plan for district-wide collection of identity-based data in November 2019, the subsequent analysis and reporting out of results and identification of next steps for action as a result of what we learn. In the OCDSB, the current project includes three key phases:

(1) **community partner meetings** - two meetings held at the beginning of May 2019 helped staff refine plans for focus group discussions with students, and parents of students who have experienced racism, bias, or barriers, including anti-Black racism, anti-Indigeneity, anti-Semitism, Homophobia, Islamophobia, Transphobia, Poverty/Classism, and Ableism/Disabilities;

(2) **student and parent focus group discussions** - two student sessions and three parent sessions allowed participants to share their experiences as they related to racism, bias, or barriers with other attendees in a safe environment; and,

(3) **the collection of identity-based data** – will take place beginning in November 2019.

Process

This Identity-Based Data Collection Project adopted a qualitative research approach to engage in conversations with the community to better understand the lived experiences in our schools regarding systemic barriers and identity-based disparities. Focus groups were utilized to obtain the narrative from students and parents. The goal of the focus groups was to explore participants' experiences, understanding and interpretations of their experiences in-depth (Tavakol & Sandars 2014).

These narratives were captured to give power and a voice to those who have been marginalized by the system. Processes and outcomes such as behaviours, attitudes, interactions, and learning environments cannot always be understood adequately through numerical data (Pope & Mays, 2006; Harding, 2013). Qualitative research is well established and has gained acceptance as a valuable tool in the study of education, with a growing recognition that they can be pursued with rigour (Ramani & Mann, 2016). The information collected from focus groups will help the District better understand the disparities, biases, and gaps that exist in the system, and help shape questions for the data collection tool. They will also assist in setting priorities for analysis and reporting.

Who Participated?

The Identity-based Data Collection project involves collecting data from community partners, parents, and students. As a first step, the community partner meetings helped with planning for recruitment of parents and students for the focus groups and for the actual data collection scheduled to take place in November 2019. Guiding questions for both focus groups were developed based on the feedback received from the community partners. Focus groups provided a safe environment for students and parents to share their lived experiences within the school board. Recruitment strategies and data collection methods were as follows:

1. Community Partners

An invitation letter with guiding questions was sent to 40 community partner organizations and/or individuals with whom the District had an established relationship and that represent the eight groups of students identified above. They were asked to invite up to three members from their respective communities. Dates and venues were communicated to the community partners, along with an online registration link. A total of 44 community members from diverse communities attended one of the two meetings where they discussed the following questions:

- What are the conditions that need to be in place for students and parents to feel safe in sharing their experiences and that they have been heard?
- What suggestions do you have for focus group question that will help us identify potential systemic barriers and/or bias from the lived experiences?
- What strategies do you have that might support engagement of your community in either the focus groups or the data collection in the fall?
- Is there anything we should be asking in the focus groups?

2. Student Focus Groups

Principals from OCDSB secondary schools (7-12 and 9-12) were asked to recruit a maximum of five (5) students in grades 7 to 12 to participate in the focus groups sessions and to identify a member of staff who could accompany the students to the venue. Sessions were held at non-OCDSB facilities at the recommendation of community partners. Approximately 60 students from 11 schools participated in the opportunity to discuss the following questions with their peers:

- How do you identify yourself and why is that important to you?
- How has your identity been shaped within the school system?
- What has helped to create a sense of belonging in your school? What has helped promote your academic success?
- What has prevented you from feeling and doing your best in school?
- What do you think is important for the school system district to consider when collecting identity-based data?

3. Parent Focus Groups

Multiple ways of communication were used to recruit parents for focus groups including a memorandum to principals that included posters to create awareness at the school, and distribution of information letters and invitations to parents/guardians of all students via the District's *School Connects* system. While the invitation suggested that these discussions may be of particular interest to parents of students who have experienced racism, bias, or barriers, including anti-Black, anti-Indigeneity, anti-Semitism, Homophobia, Islamophobia, Transphobia, Poverty/Classism, and Ableism/Disabilities, no restrictions were placed on participation from parents/guardians of students who do not identify in these ways.

Participation in the focus groups was voluntary and no personal information was collected. Sessions were organized for parents of students in our District, and took place on June 11, 17, and 18 from 7 p.m. – 9 p.m. Two sessions were held off-site, and one was held at a secondary school. These discussions were used to gather information from parents of students in kindergarten through Grade 12.

The following questions were used to shape the discussion for parent's focus group:

- Why is identity important?
- How has the school system impacted your child's sense of identity?
- What has helped promote your child's academic success and sense of belonging?
- What has prevented your child from feeling and doing their best in school?
- What do you think is important for the school district to consider when collecting identity-based data?

A total of 147 participants registered for the parent focus group discussions. Out of the 147 - 81 registered for June 11, 52 registered for June 17, and 14 registered for June 18. Students attending the sessions and/or their parents expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have these conversations and help shape our work moving forward.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participants' responses to questions were recorded by a note taker assigned to each table – in most cases note takers were members of central staff (primarily research and instructional coaches from Curriculum Services, Equity, and Indigenous Education). The data collected from community partners, student and parent focus group discussions were analyzed using NVivo. A standard thematic coding process was used to create idea groupings as well as a list of codes grouped into themes (Patton, 2002). The themes were created in response to the focus group questions and to develop a deeper understanding of systemic barriers and/or bias and their potential to impede success in learning as well as impact on students' well-being.

Strengths and Limitations

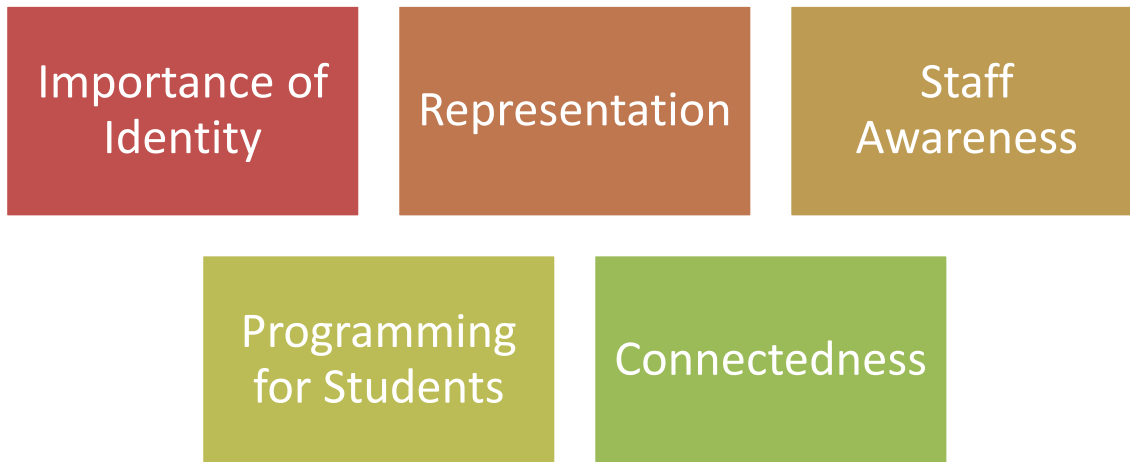
The strength of the focus group lies in gathering and sharing the lived experiences of students and parents who have experienced racism, bias, or barriers in our school system. The candidness with which participants shared their experiences was appreciated, ultimately providing a foundation that will assist the District in better understanding the challenges faced by marginalized communities in their efforts to succeed in learning. It is also worth noting that the parent focus group discussions brought together parents who were allies, parents preparing for their children to enter the system and parents of children with invisible disabilities. The questions asked by community partners, parents and expressed challenges by students will guide the development of future survey questions and help with the analysis and dissemination strategies/process. A few limitations should also be considered when interpreting the results of the focus group discussions;

- limited time to raise awareness of the session in the community,
- limited knowledge of the purpose of identity-based data collection by the participants,
- reliance on students belonging to clubs and principal's selection for recruitment,
- unequal representation of diverse groups

What We Heard

Key findings based on the focus group discussions with students and parents are reported together as the coding practice of responses revealed similar themes. Direct quotes from both students and parents have been incorporated to enhance understanding of the five themes that emerged, including: the importance of identity, representation, staff awareness, programming for students, and connectedness.

Overarching Themes



The importance of identity

Consistent with literature on the importance of identity within the educational system (e.g., a review study on the role of school in adolescents' identity development by Verhoeven, Poorthuis, & Volman, 2019), the sense of identity in schools was an overarching theme as stated by both students and parents during focus group discussions. Narratives on the importance of identity, the impact of the school system on their sense of identity, and the challenges that prevent students from feeling and doing their best in school were derived from focus group discussions. Variation in how identity is valued by those who do not identify "like them" was evident among participants. It was evident that participants highlighted the importance of identity and that it gives them meaning and a sense of belonging. At the same time, participants acknowledged the complexity of identity. The concept of identity has become visible and relevant specifically due to diversity in societies. Self-identity is viewed as a critical step in the process of ensuring that students who self-identify are recognized and matched with appropriate educational programs and supports.

"Identity is complex – it puts you into a community but emphasises your individuality."

Participants attending focus group discussions had the opportunity to explore questions and discuss the importance of identity at length. Identity is linked in many different ways to self-esteem, confidence and understanding more about who you really are as an individual. When examining the importance of identity, the majority of participants stated that they need to be themselves and express their identity. They further said that their identity helps them to reinstate their culture. They learn more about themselves. According to participants, "Identity is complex – it puts you into a community but emphasises your individuality", "identity ensures cultural safety", "identity is something to be proud of" and "identity gives an individual a sense of purpose, and direction. One parent described identity from this perspective:

"Identity goes further than the nation you're from, clan, spirit name etc. Our generation had to deal with residential schools, my parents were scared of identity, and they thought it was witchcraft."

There was overwhelming agreement among the participants regarding the complexity of the concept of identity. While most spoke about the importance of identity in “grounding” them, and that it is one thing that an individual can own and feel special about, some indicated that the issues of identity promote stereotypes. A majority of participants emphasised that the District is aware of the unequal treatment received by students who have experienced racism and bias in the system. A community member pointed out that:

“District has to acknowledge [that] harmful things have been happening and that we want change.”

Further related to the issues around identity and its connection to the public school system, one of the parents shared that:

“The school system created an identity crisis in my children. Our background, culture, and religion clash with values of school. Our kids are struggling with shaping their identities between conflicting values which result in a low sense of belonging and self-esteem.”

From the Indigenous community partner meeting, it was proposed that the District should “have a thorough understanding of cultural awareness”, and “students need to be listened to” and know that there will be “action taken” by the school system. There was an overwhelming response suggesting that the system needs to improve representation of marginalized groups in teaching and non-teaching staff, and in educational leadership. The participants echoed the different layers of demographic factors such as culture, socialization, situational encounters, and skin colour influencing the individual’s identity. There was overwhelming concerns of “tokenism” from students. This is consistent with shifts in opinion from marginalized students, who have changed from fighting within the school system with peers for their recognition to advocating for their recognition and equal treatment by staff.

Further, parents also cautioned the school board about the use of identity data. Some of the parents noted that the collection of identity-based data is important if it helps the student. However, if it is not used very well by people who are aware of different identities, it has the potential to isolate students more.

Representation

In the student focus group discussions, “representation matters, we need teachers who look like us” was a statement that resonated with many. It was clearly indicated by students that representation is central to feelings of belonging. They stated that when there are teachers who identify like them, they feel safe and that they have a trusted adult in the school. Some of the parents also pointed out that the lack of representation among staff members made students aware of the differences in how they were treated compared to their “white” counterparts.

Indigenous students felt that they are not fully reflected in the teaching staff and/or curriculum. Further, they reported that administrators have taken down Indigenous resources on the walls and not replaced them. Some also reported that they grew up in schools that are predominantly white; no representation of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit...in high school there is lot of discrimination and stereotype.

In a similar vein, families of students from other marginalized groups also expressed concern that there is lack of diversity in staff and students and that they do not see themselves reflected in the staff population. One of these parents shared:

“...schools are doing a superficial level. The data shows that 43% of students are members of racial groups but only 8% is staff. On an international day, Caucasian teachers represent different nations, which is funny. Hiring practices are keeping the school board “white.”

Parents of Indigenous students were also asked about their experience regarding the representation at schools. Responses suggested that there is no representation of Indigenous people in the school system. This has created lack of understanding by many people and promoted discrimination and stereotype, specifically in high school. Consequently, the limited exposure to positive representation at schools impact students’ sense of belonging severely. The lack of representation at schools threatens students’ identities in the classroom resulting in decreased feelings of school belonging and negatively impacting academic performance (Walton & Cohen, 2007). Moving forward, the District will need to find ways to increase representation of diverse groups in its employees.

Staff Awareness

There were lots of discussions about the role of the school system in shaping student’s identity. Across groups, participants expressed the need for the school system to change and “listen” to students. Students expressed that there are low expectations from the school staff specifically for minority students:

“...teachers hold you back, and want you to know your place...you score good marks, you are accused of plagiarism...they assume we are dumb.”

Indigenous students reported that treatment at school changes once they declared their identity. They felt that the school authorities do not listen to them. Teachers are ignorant and use trauma as teaching opportunities. For example, one of the students pointed out:

“Opportunities that were open to me when teachers thought I was White have now been closed. Now that people know I am Indigenous, teachers expect me to only work on Indigenous topics and issues. Being Indigenous is treated like a disability.”

A parent of one of our students said that “Lack of understanding and connection creates intimidation and assumptions about intelligence and capability of others. It is difficult to live like that, when you are always fighting to prove yourself.”

When asked about the impact of the school system on shaping students identity, a high school student reported that “the school system is not shaping my identity. It is my reaction to the school system...school system still treat residential school as a history project instead of something that still

hurts people today.” Further another parent reported that “Teachers need more support to be able to accommodate for students. They don’t have enough time, resources and space, to be able to treat and support students the way they need.”

Taken together, the lack of complete understanding related to values that shape identity of students from marginalized groups and limited staff awareness were identified as pervasive issues within the school system. This lack of understanding inhibits the ability to support students from diverse cultures and communities. Further, the research on the identity development at schools shows that schools and teachers may *unintentionally* convey messages to students about who they should be through differentiation and selection, teaching strategies, teacher expectations, and peer norms (Verhoeven et al., 2019).

Programming for Students

Focus group participants reported several barriers related to programming for students that interfere with their benefitting from the education system. Examination of responses from participants indicates a clear pattern associated with barriers to programming/streaming practices in schools. One of the parents reported that:

“My son was forced to go to applied courses, children are being misled. I had to take him out of the public school system and continued with the home schooling. He is doing great at the university now.”

Further, the majority of students also indicated that the programs that are taught or delivered in some of the classes (e.g., English literature, social studies, law classes) have curriculum content that is outdated. Where attempts have been made to teach about the Indigenous education, students stated that “administrators have taken down Indigenous resources on walls and not replaced them.” Additionally, one of the parents of an indigenous student shared her perspective regarding the curriculum as follows:

“the curriculum shows outdated racially stereotyped images of Indigenous communities... When the word Indian is used, teachers don’t always look to correct it. When the Inuit national anthem is sung in the morning, teachers do not stop children from making fun of throat singing.”

Some students also emphasized the importance of mental health support at schools and expressed their concerns with the lack of mental health services available at school. Many students reported not having a trusted adult at the school with whom to discuss mental health issues One of the students shared that:

“They (referring to educators) do not understand the reasons why students miss school or submit assignments late due to mental health issues.”

Many parents of students with special needs and mental health issues who attended the focus groups sessions expressed similar concerns about assumptions, values, and limitations. These parents identified limited staff knowledge of visible and invisible disabilities such as life threatening asthma/allergies as one of the biggest barriers that hinder their children's academic success. They also added that teaching and non-teaching staff's limited knowledge regarding students' special needs and Individual Education Plan (IEP) result in "treating everyone the same" or a lack of action on the part of school staff, as described by this parent:

"My child was diagnosed with Dyspraxia- lots of work done to identify and then nothing happens after that."

Accessibility within heritage buildings is also a significant barrier to students and parents with disabilities, yet they cannot be changed. Taken together, the findings suggest that there are prevalent barriers to programming for students within the school system that need to be addressed to help all students reach their full potential with respect to academic achievement and well-being.

Connectedness

Students' sense of connectedness at school is related to their academic achievement and well-being. The research on sense of belonging indicates that sense of belonging has a big impact on students' academic motivation (Goodenow, 1993) and thus is related to their academic outcomes (Becker & Luthar, 2002).

Students from focus groups reported that extra-curricular activities help them become more involved in schools. These students shared the examples of extra-curricular activities such as clubs and sports activities, cultural celebrations, and events like "Black Students Symposium" and "Indigenous Youth Symposium" as opportunities to help them connect with friends who identify like them and increase their sense of belonging. A parent reported:

"Lunch club allowed my child to have sense of belonging outside regular classroom with access to other peers in the school."

Similarly some students shared that:

"..club and sports activities and, cultural celebrations are great opportunities to help us connect with friends who identify like us and increase our sense of belonging."

These occasions create spaces where students find their community members, learn more about their cultures, and are able to socialize with their peers. The current research on schools' role in shaping students' feelings of connectedness also supports the idea of organizing various learning experiences to provide students with opportunities to explore different identities in a supportive climate at school (Verhoeven, Poorthuis, & Volman, 2019).

Conclusion

Understanding our students and factors that contribute to their academic success, well-being, ability to build resiliency and cherish their values are important principles for the District. The research on the relationship between students' identity, academic success, and well-being suggests that a relatively strong identity helps students to be more resilient, reflective, and autonomous in making important life decisions (e.g., Flum & Kaplan 2006; Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia 2010). Throughout the first phase of the identity-based data collection, the District wanted to better understand the challenges and successes that students experience in school. The importance of identity was a key finding, yet there were varying perspectives about what defines identity and how identity impacts students' school experience. As a second key theme, representation and advocating for the marginalized were among the key aspects of ensuring that students feel understood and were able to own their identity. Both students and parents propose interventions to engage student voice in problem solving, an idea supported by Day-Vines et al. (2007). For example, it was recommended by community partners that the District should find ways of eliminating "preconceived notions of what it means to be an immigrant" and "stop perpetuating cultural stereotypes". The third theme was related to barriers to programming and streaming for students. It is vital to create and encourage inclusive opportunities within schools to meet students varied needs and build further all-inclusive programs and streaming practices. Finally, the decreased level of perceived sense of belonging was another key issue discussed during the focus group discussions. Moving forward, considering strategies aimed at promoting greater sense of belonging is warranted. Ultimately, the District must find better ways and standards of practice that will help us identify equitable and inclusive ways for improving student achievement and well-being.

Next Step

This work was considered an important first step in seeking community input to help inform thinking about how the collection of identity based data could help to overcome systemic barriers and identity-based disparities. The information gathered from the community partner meetings, students, parents/families focus group discussions will be used in planning for the collection of the identity-based data in November 2019. We have listened to what community partners, parents/families, as well as students have told us. Moving forward, the District will continue in its on-going efforts to seek feedback on the survey questions and process for the Identity-Based Data Collection.

Further, the District currently reports on a range of student data, such as program enrolment, graduation rates, special education supports, suspensions and expulsions. Identity-based data will enhance the District's capacity to understand areas of strength and need for particular student populations. The collection of Identity-Based data will allow for the linkage of survey data to other administrative data (e.g., achievement data, suspension data, course participation rates, etc.) in order to respond to the following types of questions:

- Who are the students who lack a sense of belonging at school? What are some strategies schools could try that would create a more inclusive environment for students?
- Who are the students who feel disengaged from school? (e.g., attendance patterns)
- Who are the students who are most likely to be enrolled in academic, or applied, level courses? Who do students turn to most often when deciding which courses to take?
- Are some students suspended at a higher rate compared to others? If so, who are they?
- Which students report not feeling safe at school?

- Which groups of students perform below the provincial standard on measures of achievement (e.g., provincial assessments, report card)?
- Are there some students who are less likely to attain full credit accumulation in grade 9, 10, etc. that would limit their ability to graduate with their peers?

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Key Project Timelines and Tasks

Working with a survey distribution period of 26 November through 13 December, major project timelines and key tasks are as follows:

Time Period	Key Tasks
May – June 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Partner Meetings • Focus Groups with Students and Parents
July – August 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of Data from Focus Groups • Preparation of Summary Report from Focus Groups • Draft Survey Development
September – October 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder consultation to provide status update and seek input on process/plans moving forward and engagement strategies of their respective communities (e.g., Community Partners, IAC, ACE, SEAC, PIC)
October – November 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • System readiness training (CCDI modules) • Memo to school principals (purpose, process, timelines, etc.) • Pilot administration with small sample of schools/grades; analysis of pilot data; refinement of survey tool(s) • Communications with parents, students and community
November 26 – December 13, 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survey Administration
December 2019 – January 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledgement/Appreciation/Notice of Next Steps
January – April 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data analysis • Stakeholder consultation
May/June 2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Release of preliminary results
September 2020 - beyond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of survey data in other analysis and reporting (ASAR, suspensions, etc)