



# EQUITY, INCLUSION AND ANTI-RACISM COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, MAY 26, 2021

5:30 pm – 7:00 (Virtual Meeting Via Microsoft Teams)

## **ATTENDANCE**

<b>Community Members:</b>	Emily Kovacs, Niagara Folk Arts Multicultural Centre Kim Ansell, PFLAG St. Catharines & Niagara Nyarayi Kapisavanhu, TOES Niagara
<b>Parent Members:</b>	Nina Jain-Sheenan Carole Moss Amber Dyck Tassia Gabbidon
<b>Student Members:</b>	Joy Ge Kya Steinbach-Parker Manara Abdelgadir
<b>Trustee Member:</b>	Shannon Mitchell
<b>DSBN Administrative Staff:</b>	Warren Hoshizaki, Director of Education Kelly Pisek, Superintendent of Education
<b>DSBN Staff:</b>	Pratima Burton, Administrator, Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism Zakia Hamdani, Consultant, Equity Inclusion and Anti-Racism Maryam Safdar Ali, Human Rights Advisor Erika Smith, Secondary Teacher, Grimsby Secondary School
<b>Recording Secretary:</b>	Jennifer Reid
<b>Regrets:</b>	Dr. Robyn Bourgeois, Brock University, Maurice Grant, Layal Aboukors, Elementary Teacher, Dalewood Public School

## **WELCOME AND LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Chair Shannon Mitchell welcomed committee members and opened the meeting with an Acknowledgement of Traditional Territory of the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples. Chair Mitchell shared with the committee that student committee member Kya Steinbach-Parker was recently selected as the new Indigenous Student Trustee for the DSBN.

## **APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

Moved by Kaya Steinbach-Parker

Seconded by Carole Moss

“That the agenda be approved.”

**CARRIED**

## **MEMBER CHECK-IN**

Consultant Zakia Hamdani welcomed everyone and asked members to share what was on their mind through ThoughtExchange. Committee members were provided the link and time to type their thoughts. Consultant Zakia Hamdani added that this was one way to gather immediate feedback and interaction among committee members and that we would be trying a variety of methods with this group.

## **CURRENT INITIATIVES**

### **DSBN EQUITY WEBPAGE**

System Administrator Pratima Burton thanked the committee for the feedback they provided on the DSBN Equity Webpage and gave the following updates on some of the recommendations.

A DSBN Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism button has been added to each elementary and secondary school website. This involved support from the DSBN Communications and IT Teams. Families and students are now able to access the equity page from any school website.

In addition, the Equity Team is collaborating with the Parent Involvement Committee, Indigenous Education Team, Special Education Support Services, and the Mental Health and Well-Being Team to have each group’s information linked to the DSBN Equity Webpage. These changes are expected to happen in the new school year.

DSBN Information Technology Systems and Communications are working together on all aspects of the DSBN website to ensure it is accessible for all and meets the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act.

System Administrator Pratima Burton mentioned that there was a suggestion to include information about where families can connect with the DSBN Equity Team and shared that the DSBN Communications Department is working on the logistics of this recommendation. System Administrator Pratima Burton added that as always, the first step when there is a concern is to start with the school Principal and if there isn’t a school based resolution, the next step would be to reach out to the school Superintendent as part of the conflict resolution process.

Superintendent Pisek mentioned that the Communications Team is reworking the entire Contact Us page at this time and that it will be shared with the committee upon completion.

### **ENGAGE OUR COMMUNITY AT LARGE**

Superintendent Kelly Pisek thanked committee members for their input on how to engage our community at large and stated that this is an on-going question in the DSBN and not the work of this committee alone. Members were reminded of the key questions; How do we as a committee consider doing this? How would you in your individual role do this? How do we as the DSBN Equity team do this? Superintendent Pisek shared a summary of the input from the committee which included the following:

- Early exposure to books, movies, poems, or other works done by marginalized groups can help form positive beliefs. Superintendent Pisek added that DSBN staff are participating in a professional development series that is accompanied by the book, *Cultivating Genius* by Dr. Gholdy Muhammed.
- Presentations in schools about equity, inclusion, and accessibility
- Social media and promoting the Equity website via school websites would help reach a wider audience

- Ongoing conversations
- Indigenous Community involvement
- Seek input from working groups in Niagara and the voice of the committee

Superintendent Pisek added the importance of the input from this committee as it is shared with other committees and departments to improve how the DSBN supports students, families, and community members.

### JUNE PRIDE RESOURCES

Consultant Zakia Hamdani shared that in commemoration of Pride Month in June, all schools as well as the Board office will raise the flag for the month of June. As well, on June 1<sup>st</sup> a video of the Pride flag raising ceremony held at the DSBN will be shared on social media. Consultant Zakia Hamdani added that as pride month approaches, the Equity Team consulted with community, students, and staff to curate a resource to support schools and teachers to build awareness, joy and connect to the community through agency support and community events. This resource will be regularly reviewed and revised to ensure it is up to date.

### EQUITY ACTION PLAN

System Administrator Pratima Burton addressed the matter of the Equity Action Plan on the website as being under review. This year the DSBN went from having an Equity and Inclusive Education team to being more intentional and renaming the team as the Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Racism team to center the important work that has to happen to build capacity at the system, school and classroom level around anti-oppression. In addition, the Equity team recognized the importance to involve student, staff, and community voice in the work and as result developed this committee. The Equity Team continues to work under the six tenets identified as student voice, from safe to brave spaces, culturally and historically responsive curriculum, anti-bias, anti-racism and anti-oppression learning, community partnership and identifying and removing systemic barriers, but did not compose a public action plan. Instead, the Equity team wanted to gather feedback from all stakeholders about the work being done and reflect on the work this year as goals for the upcoming years are considered.

Moving into next year the Equity team will continue to gather data and work with school and system leaders to embed equity goals in all areas. As well, the learning that has already happened will be put into action alongside ongoing learning. This year the focus was on staff learning; next year the focus will be on student voice and culturally responsive curriculum delivery. The DSBN Equity team will create an action plan that will be multifaceted and multi-layered and looks forward to gathering feedback and input and sharing pieces of it with this committee in its development. The goal is for families to look at the Action Plan, see where the DSBN has been and where the DSBN is going in very concrete terms on the webpage. In response to a question about the feedback received, System Administrator Pratima Burton clarified that feedback and input received will be shared with this committee.

### **FEEDBACK**

#### GRADE 9 DE-STREAMING

Superintendent Helen McGregor and Secondary School Principal Neil Sheard shared a presentation with the committee regarding Grade 9 de-streaming.

Students entering grade nine in September that typically selected academic or applied courses will now take all their compulsory subjects at the academic level (English, French, geography, math, science). The DSBN Board of Trustees supported this approach in all DSBN secondary schools for equity for all students and to remove systemic barriers that had been in place for many students. This provides all students an equal opportunity to succeed. Provincially, with the new math curriculum being released in the fall, there will be a shift for grade 9 de-streamed math.

Administrator Neil Sheard mentioned that the DSBN Academy has de-streamed courses for the last eight years and 100% of the Academy's students have received post-secondary acceptances. The class sizes for de-streamed

courses will fall between that of an academic and applied course – around 26/27.

In preparation for this initiative, key stakeholder groups received presentations to understand the need for the change. Training was provided for all staff, with intentional training for guidance counsellors, student success and special education staff to understand that the supports needed for students will look different moving forward. Staff will work together to ensure all students succeed, focusing on each student's strengths and teachers will continue to instill a growth mindset in their students. Teacher writing teams are being established for all de-streamed subjects. These will include strategies for the first couple of weeks of school with a focus on building relationships, feeling comfortable as learners and the freedom to make mistakes. Learning has been ongoing for teachers and will continue into the summer and next school year in collaboration with the curriculum, equity, Indigenous Education and Special Educations teams.

Superintendent Helen McGregor explained that there are strategies in place for students who may require extra support and that staff are participating in ongoing professional development to put these strategies into action for students. With the goal of supporting all learners, reading intervention and other support strategies will continue, as well, ongoing training will be provided for staff (equity, reading AQ etc.) and special education staff will continue to work with and advocate for students.

Neil Sheard shared that letters were sent to all grade eight parents at the beginning of April to make them aware of the change. In addition, a presentation was made at a Parent Involvement Committee meeting. As well, there will be on-going communication in the fall. The communication process will be reviewed to ensure it is accessible as well as be clear about why this change is important for students.

#### CREED ACCOMMODATIONS

Consultant Zakia Hamdani explained that the DSBN Creed Accommodations Parent Guide was developed to help families understand the process and remove the barrier of having to ask so they can actively engage as partners with the school in acquiring religious and creed-based accommodations. These partnerships will help to support an equitable education system that upholds and reflects the principles of fair, anti-racist and inclusive education to create positive outcomes for all students. Members received a copy of the document prior to the meeting and invited to review and give feedback to ensure that the intended message of the guideline is user-friendly, understandable and doesn't leave one with more questions. Members were also given the option to use a digital platform (Padlet) to share thoughts.

Committee members shared that the guide was focused on the responsibility of the parent and asked about DSBN. Consultant Zakia Hamdani shared there is a guideline for staff that encompasses the responsibilities of the DSBN. A committee member suggested that the example of having an accommodation for a place for students to pray during Ramadan be changed to include at any time during the year. Consultant Zakia Hamdani explained that this was in the administrative guide for staff and will be considered for the parent guide as well.

Consultant Zakia Hamdani invited members to continue to give feedback through Padlet, for the remainder of the week. It was also suggested that a component of the staff guide be shared with schools next year when these revisions are implemented.

#### DATES FOR 2021 -2022

Superintendent Pisek shared that in planning for next year, four committee meetings have been established.

Tuesday October 5, 2021

Tuesday January 11, 2022

Tuesday March 1, 2022

Tuesday May 3, 2022

## **INPUT**

### **GOOGLE SURVEY**

System Administrator Pratima Burton explained that the work of this committee is brought to the School Board Trustees Equity Committee by Chair Shannon Mitchell. It is also reported at the open board meeting and the minutes are posted publicly after each meeting. The intent of this is to protect the privacy of the members of this voluntary committee and to allow for a space for the committee to speak freely and openly about their questions and concerns related to the work presented at each meeting. In moving forward into the 2021-2022 school year and as a committee member you reflect, are you comfortable with this approach to sharing meeting items through Chair Mitchell and the minutes? Do you have any other input or thoughts to consider about the format for next year? System Administrator Pratima Burton invited the committee to give their input on these two questions using google survey and stated that the link would be provided after the meeting.

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

Chair Shannon Mitchell thanked committee members for sharing concerns and giving feedback and stressed the importance of the input of this committee in the work in schools and at the Board to ensure it is equitable.

The meeting adjourned at 6:51 p.m.