

DATE: APRIL 27, 2022

FROM: Christel Brautigam, Assistant Superintendent

SUBJECT: DIVERSITY AND ANTIRACISM WORKING GROUP REPORT

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board receive the report of the Diversity and Anti-Racism Working Group, and support the priorities identified through:

1. Establishment of a DEI Advisory Committee to work with staff to move forward on the priorities identified by the Diversity and Antiracism Working Group.
2. Monitoring progress on these priorities through the strategic plan update process, regular reporting from the DEI Advisory Committee through the board standing committee structure, and an annual report to the Board from the DEI Advisory Committee.

STRATEGIC PLAN REFERENCE

Strategic Priority Two, Goal One: *District learning environments are equitable and inclusive.*

Strategic Priority Two, Goal Two: *The district actively addresses unconscious bias and privilege, systemic discrimination and marginalization based on factors such as ability, colour, cultural identity, gender, gender identity, Indigeneity, political beliefs, race, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and socio- economic status.*

Objective 1.2: Conduct an antiracism audit to examine our policies, language used in publications, stakeholder experiences, etc.

Objective 1.3: Review, prioritize and develop a workplan to implement recommendations based on antiracism audit (subject to Board approval).

Objective 2.4: Review and take action on additional recommendations emerging from antiracism audit and equity scan (subject to Board approval).

BACKGROUND

The Diversity and Antiracism Working Group was formed as a result of the following motion made at the June 10, 2020 public meeting of the Board of Education.

THAT the Board of Education (Richmond) form a Diversity and Antiracism Working Group in the upcoming school year, comprised of board and district stakeholder representatives, with a mandate which will include:

- consultation with students, staff, and other partner groups regarding their experiences with racism within the school district

- a review of what the district is currently doing with respect to educating students about various forms of racism
- a review of current district policy and practices regarding incidents of racism
- identification of what gaps the district needs to address regarding anti-racism education and practices, including but not limited to, policy, hiring practices, staff professional development, school and district culture and educational initiatives, and advocacy regarding curriculum and other provincial initiatives
- and make recommendations to the Board for further action

PROCESS

The Diversity and Antiracism Working Group is comprised of two Trustee representatives, as well as members from the following partner groups: CUPE, RASA, RDPA RMAPS, RTA, and Executive. The Diversity and Antiracism Working Group was formed in the Fall of 2020.

To fulfil the Board’s mandate, the Diversity and Antiracism Working Group sought the services of a consulting company to conduct a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) audit.

Proposals for audits were received from eight local consulting companies and were reviewed by the Diversity and Antiracism Working Group. Criteria for selection included:

- A diverse team that could support the scope of our work;
- Previous experience with school districts;
- A willingness to work with the working group to have input into the process and survey design;
- A focus on both qualitative and quantitative data;
- A genuine interest in our mandate;
- Clarity and accountability in the audit process;
- Provision of specific and actionable recommendations; and
- Provision of advice on how to sustain the work going forward.

The Diversity and Antiracism Working Group determined that Bakau Consulting, located in Vancouver, provided the best fit for our mandate and criteria.

The team at Bakau Consulting gathered and analyzed both qualitative and quantitative data in June 2021 from:

- Secondary Student Survey (978 respondents)
- Elementary Student Survey (644 respondents)
- Parent and Alumni Survey (545 respondents)
- Employee Survey (617 respondents)
- 18 focus groups representing all partner groups (420 participants)
- 40 documents inclusive of policies and manuals

There are three reports that form the entire audit package which was received in November 2021:

- Key Terminology, Survey and Focus Group Data and Analysis
 - Survey data in the form of graphs and charts
 - An analysis section that highlights what the data may mean in context
 - Focus group summaries of overall themes and themes specific to the partner groups
 - Some direct quotes from respondents
- Analysis of Policies and Procedures
- Recommendations

The Diversity and Antiracism Working Group is extremely grateful to the students, parents, and staff who contributed to the audit process by filling in the surveys and participating in focus groups. It was of high importance to the working group that all of the data was considered very carefully in order to honour the vulnerability with which people came forward to share their views and experiences.

The data represents the personal experiences and stories of the participants in the surveys and focus groups who are from partner groups in SD38. The audit package highlights areas of need expressed by those who participated and highlights the voices of those who expressed feelings of marginalization. The audit package is designed to identify areas requiring attention. While there are many areas where the district is doing well in relationship to DEI, the intention of this report and the audit package from Bakau Consulting is to draw our attention to potential areas for improvement.

RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES

The Diversity and Antiracism Working Group engaged in a process of systematically reviewing the audit package from Bakau Consulting. After a thorough analysis, the working group is bringing forward the following recommended priorities for the Board's consideration.

Establish a DEI Advisory Committee

Rationale:

The Diversity and Antiracism Working Group has identified eight priorities outlined below based on the audit package from Bakau Consulting. These priorities require focused attention from staff and partner groups to ensure these priorities are successfully implemented. A DEI Advisory Committee that includes representatives from partner groups will support the priorities through ongoing engagement and commitment to the identified priorities and reviewing progress on them.

Draft Terms of Reference:

Mandate:

A representative school district partner group advisory committee will be established. This committee will act in an advisory capacity for the implementation of the priorities outlined in this report.

Composition:

- Trustees
- Assistant Superintendent, Executive Director - Human Resources, District Administrator Equity and Inclusion, Teacher Consultant Equity and Inclusion,
- Partner Group Representatives; CUPE, RASA, RDPA, RMAPS, RTA, Students, Community Partners (such as RCMP, City of Richmond, etc as appropriate)

Reporting:

- Report to Board of Education on a regular basis (on a schedule determined by the Board of Education) regarding progress on implementation of the priorities including operational planning, and establishment of goals and targets in alignment with Strategic Priorities
 - This may be achieved through the Strategic Plan update process, regular reporting through the standing committee structure and an annual report to the board

Meetings:

- Meeting frequency to be established once the committee has been formed

Develop an Employee Focused DEI Implementation Strategy

Rationale:

Through the surveys and focus groups conducted as part of the DEI audit, participants across employee groups expressed a strong desire for learning opportunities related to DEI. The Diversity and Antiracism Working Group feels that fostering a strong connection to why these learning opportunities are important will increase engagement in the learning. Many respondents referenced inappropriate joking and stereotyping as regular occurrences in our schools and district workplaces. It will be important to develop learning opportunities for all employees to make clear the impact of inappropriate behaviour, as well as setting a clear expectation for appropriate behaviours. Ideally, all employees will be provided foundational understandings from which to grow and develop an appreciation of why DEI is a district priority.

Develop a Student Focused DEI Implementation Strategy

Rationale:

Many student respondents referenced inappropriate joking and stereotyping as regular, frequent occurrences in school. Some students also reported feeling marginalized, unsafe, unheard, and discriminated against. Many students expressed a desire to be involved in the solution, and in supporting their fellow students to understand the impact and harm caused through behaviours that further feelings of marginalization and exclusion. They also expressed the need to feel heard and supported by adults when reporting and discussing issues related to DEI. The development of learning materials and supports for educators to understand the implications and impact of certain behaviours on students, as well as setting a clear expectation that this behaviour is unacceptable in Richmond schools is necessary.

Support All Schools and Facilities to be Safe and Brave Spaces

Rationale:

Spaces that are inclusive of all, and where all (employees, students, parents, and the community) feel comfortable learning, working, sharing, and growing are considered to be 'safe and brave.' The surveys and focus groups surfaced that many students reported feeling excluded in school settings. Additionally, many students, parents, and staff expressed they feel powerless to share their thoughts and feelings, or to report an incident without fear of repercussion or being marginalized. The opportunities to hear and take action on feedback from our partner groups on an ongoing basis will strengthen the overall commitment to the district's DEI goals and contribute to the growth of safe and brave spaces.

Ensure That Clear Reporting Guidelines for Incidents Causing Harm, such as Discrimination, Racism, and Sexual Harassment are Implemented, Including Measures to Make Reporting Safer, and to Provide Clarity Regarding All Steps That will be Followed in the Process

Rationale:

Across all partner groups there was considerable feedback about a lack of clarity regarding what to do if harm is caused; how to report it, who to report it to, and what the next steps should be. There was expressed discomfort in reporting to school personnel for fear of how the person reporting may be viewed for bringing an issue forward. There was a general feeling that too often, nothing would come from reporting a concern. Staff, students, and parents require adequate support to understand the accountability process and the impacts of harm.

This includes, through a trauma informed lens, developing clear structures and supports for those whom incidents of discrimination, racism, sexual harassment, and other incidents of harm (such as joking and stereotyping) are reported including what to do after an event is experienced, witnessed or reported so that there are clear expectations for the witness or person to whom an event is reported

Update and/or Develop District Policies and Regulations with Clearly Articulated DEI Principles and Consideration of the Intended Reading Audience

Rationale:

Policies and regulations are the foundation from where the school district's values and commitment to equity and inclusion are articulated. It was identified that many policies include outdated language that does not reflect today's evolving terminology. Due to the sometimes complex nature of policy language, if individuals are not familiar with reading policy, the sheer volume and complexities of how all these documents interact can pose barriers to understanding. Ensuring that policies are reviewed and developed with DEI principles in mind will help make the commitment to equity and inclusion more visible. Examples of this may include consistent templates for policy documents to make policy more user friendly.

The report from Bakau Consulting includes reference to specific policies that the Policy Committee may wish to analyze in more detail.

Increase Student Voice and Leadership in DEI Initiatives

Rationale:

A number of students expressed a desire to be directly involved in supporting DEI work in their schools. The students who participated in focus groups were passionate advocates for cultivating a sense of ownership and youth leadership in the area of DEI and expressed that their peers would be more inclined to model behavior they see championed by other students.

Increasing student voice includes seeking ways to include all student voices meaningfully and in safe and supportive ways, to engage in a consistent feedback loop between students and staff, as well as involving students in changing culture to reduce discrimination and harm.

Engage in Decolonizing Practices as Part of the Board's Commitment to Truth and Reconciliation

Rationale:

As part of the Board's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation as referenced in Strategic Priority 1, Goal 3 and the District's current Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement, active reflection on the impact of systemic structures that many view as colonial is an important aspect of DEI work. There is an expressed

desire for DEI work to be integrated and embedded within the work of the school district. Actions in isolation may be deemed performative because they do not go deeper to combat the underlying inequity. The deeper work of DEI must incorporate ongoing actions, practices, policies, and procedures that ensure the sustainability and growth of the work over time.

Some examples of decolonizing practices as they may relate to SD38 include but are not limited to;

- Recognizing the ongoing impacts of colonialism by reflecting on whose knowledge and ways are given priority in policy, procedure and practice, with the question, is there a balance of viewpoints and representation?
- Fostering a connection to place in district spaces including classroom learning, and land acknowledgements
- Honouring the First People's Principles of Learning
- Undergoing continual reflection on policies and existing structures to reveal where there may be embedded bias towards any person or group of people
- Including healing and restorative practices when a harm is caused
- Validating experiences with a focus on resilience and resolution verses a deficit approach
- Focusing on communication strategies that seek to bring more people into the conversation including parents and the community

Develop Inclusive Supports for the Parent/Caregiver Community Including Parent Advisory Councils

Rationale:

Increasing parental engagement by developing a greater appreciation and celebration of diversity is extremely important to the parent-school relationship. Diversity within our school communities continues to grow, and many parents expressed a desire to learn how to strengthen relationships across diverse communities. A number of parents also expressed a desire to learn more about what is happening in schools so that they can partner in deepening their child's learning related to DEI.

CONCLUSION:

The district is very grateful to all the members of the Diversity and Antiracism Working Group who have demonstrated enormous commitment to the mandate set out by the Board in June 2020. As the mandate of the working group comes to a close, and the Board considers the priorities identified in this report, the members of the Diversity and Antiracism Working Group would also like to thank the Board for its ongoing commitment to furthering the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion through the goals of the strategic plan, further supported by the findings of the working group. The Diversity and Antiracism Working Group would also like to express sincere gratitude to the students, parents and staff who shared their voices through the survey and focus group process.

Respectfully submitted,

*Christel Brautigam
Assistant Superintendent*