Dismantling Hate and Oppression Framework

Closing the Gaps: Eliminating Inequities

Within The York Region District School Board

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Lack of Psychological Safety and Sense of Belonging	There is a need for YRDSB to continue to foster a safe, inclusive, and identity-affirming environment that promotes whole-student learning. All stakeholders need to feel empowered and inspired to evoke individual and collective advocacy skills to speak up and contribute meaningfully to improve the ethos within the YRDSB and denounce any incident that threatens to derail this positive cultural change.
Lack of Consistency, Transparency and Accountability	All stakeholders must feel valued and respected as team members. This can only be achieved when there is consistency in enforcing policies and decision-making, done fairly. Such an approach inculcates trust when there is a transparent process in which all decisions can be measured and fosters a system of accountability. This should inevitably have a positive impact on lowering the risk of conflict within interpersonal interactions.
Lack of Collectivism/Solidarity	While so many see the executive leaders of the school district as the key players in cultural and climate change, this perspective is flawed and reinforces the “factions” culture within YRDSB. The goal of championing equity and inclusivity is a shared vision and purpose among all stakeholders. In that case, there is little room for the bystander approach and for influence in perpetuating and mitigating any behaviour that may constitute hate, oppression, and discrimination. Ongoing consultations with various communities facilitate collaboration with students, families, community organizations, staff, and other stakeholders to inform significant decisions is a necessary component in engendering shared vision, purpose, and responsibility.
Lateral/ Intra-group Conflicts	Lateral conflict was endemic within the school district and stems from the concept of lateral violence. Lateral violence occurs in marginalized groups where members strike out at each other due to oppression. The term describes how physical and psychological violence is directed at members within one's own group instead of the oppressor and has, among other things, been used to explain so-called ‘minority on minority violence’. Lateral violence stems from a complex mix of cultural, historical, and social dynamics and includes several behaviors such as gossip; jealousy; bullying; shaming; social exclusion; family feuds; organizational conflict; physical violence; psychological violence and threats of violence (MacNeil, 2021).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Persistence of Colonial Ideology and Culture	We all live in an inherited system where the world is viewed and judged based on binaries- fundamental equity components. The ideology of white supremacy impacts attitudes and behaviours in all peoples, regardless of race, culture, gender, or religion and this, over time, contributes to these behaviours and attitudes becoming normalized and taken-for-granted. This taken-for-grantedness creates a permissive cultural and societal norm with a high tolerance for exclusionary behaviours. Additionally, an ethos is also fostered where Eurocentrism is used as the gold standard, thus leading to institutionalized intolerance of marginalized and minoritized groups being 'othered', and a pervasiveness of insufficient response to incidents of racism and discrimination where reports may be denied, ignored, minimized, or excused.
Need to Align Cultural Change with Policy Change	Policies, frameworks and strategies cannot be the levers in purporting anti-oppressive and antiracist values. While these tools are necessary, they have to be used in tandem with intentional efforts to effect cultural/ systemic changes.
Need for Meaningful Integration	Identifying and proactively addressing/ remedying the barriers that hinder meaningful integration and inclusion of new immigrants, refugees, various racial, religious and ethnocultural groups, gender diverse, linguistically challenged, individuals with complex needs, including mental health and disabilities, is critical to building an egalitarian social context across the YRDSB. Although representation in the various groups is growing, the lack of an effective social integration strategy can lead to continued hostility and resistance which fuel predatory behaviours towards marginalized and minoritized individuals and or groups.
Lack of a Diverse Staff	A white-dominant workforce with low representation of other ethnic and equity-serving groups has been known to influence prejudicial decisions and behaviours. The staffing structure or compliment can influence the use of a narrow lens among members from a non-dominant group and the acceptance and perpetuation of stigma and stereotypes about particular individuals and groups that can hinder the cultural shift/ alignment. In the interim, empowering staff to be responsive with support and professional development to sensitize them to the varied needs of the school population, and to dissolve biases that prevent inclusive pedagogical outcomes are paramount. It would also help to engender critical consciousness by creating inclusive curricula that showcase the diversity of the school population and encourage excellence for all students, especially those at risk of being invisible in the curriculum.
Need for a Learning/Growth-Oriented Culture	There is a rigidity in the perspective that there is one way of doing things or that outdated ways of knowing and doing should not be challenged or updated. Such a culture gives little autonomy for staff to take risks and be innovative. This is also based on the lack of preparation for resistance and barriers; hence, while professional learning is being offered, there is little room given for staff to test skills within the context that they may make mistakes as part of the process. The capacity must be created for staff, especially teachers who are intentional about gaining critical consciousness and joining in the shared role of equity work to be supported in re-imagining their pedagogy and responses to socially constructing a classroom environment that lends to psychological safety and identity affirmation.

CALLS TO ACTION TO PRIORITIZE DURING IMPLEMENTATION

DHOF

1. Leadership and Commitment

Establish a clear and visible commitment from district leadership to promote anti-oppression, anti-discrimination, and anti-racism. Be bold enough to call oppression, discrimination and racism by their names, thus setting the standard for this to be a pillar on which the school board stands and sets the tone for the entire district.

2. Reporting Mechanism

Improve the current reporting mechanism, especially concerning responsiveness and triaging complaints.

3. DHOF Strategy / Charter

Create a partnership of all core stakeholders from equity-deserving groups, parents/ family and community partners and commit to the strategy and recommendations outlined in the framework.

4. Education and Awareness

Provide mandatory ongoing training for all staff, including teachers, administrators, and support staff, on issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Implement age-appropriate curricula that highlight the contributions of marginalized communities and address historical injustices. Organize workshops and seminars to raise awareness about the impact of racism, hate, discrimination and oppression. Collaborate with the community to access resources necessary to facilitate trauma-informed pedagogy.

5. Inclusive Curriculum

Perform periodic environmental scans to stay abreast of demographics and climate within the school district, and to inform a culturally appropriate curriculum. Review and update curricular materials to ensure they accurately represent diverse perspectives and experiences. Integrate culturally responsive teaching practices that acknowledge and celebrate students' diverse backgrounds.

6. Safe and Inclusive Environment

Foster a safe and inclusive learning environment by addressing bullying, harassment, racism, ableism, and any discriminatory behaviour promptly and effectively. Implement restorative justice practices as an alternative to punitive measures, encouraging dialogue and understanding. Explore alternative wellbeing supports, inclusive healing spaces and culturally appropriate environmental supports.

7. Student Engagement

Empower student-led diversity, equity and inclusion clubs or groups to be advocates for positive change. Provide platforms for students to share their experiences and perspectives and incorporate their input into decision-making processes. Review/update current policies to allow for student trustees to vote on matters before the board for consideration.

8. Community Engagement

Collaborate with parents, guardians, and community organizations to reinforce the values of equity, inclusion, and diversity within the broader community. Organize and host community town hall meetings, workshops, and dialogues to facilitate conversations around diversity, tolerance, and inclusion.

9. Data Collection and Analysis

Collect data on student outcomes, discipline rates, and access to resources to identify disparities and address them proactively. Regularly analyze data to measure progress and adjust strategies as needed. Continue to routinely collect disaggregated race-based data that supports the examination of racialized and marginalized students' experiences and outcomes. These include data surrounding disciplinary actions, graduation and dropout rates, and special education registration.

10. Equity Representation in Staffing and Professional Development

Prioritize hiring a diverse staff that reflects the student population. Offer professional development opportunities to help staff members address bias, microaggressions, and create culturally inclusive classrooms.

11. Policy Review and Implementation

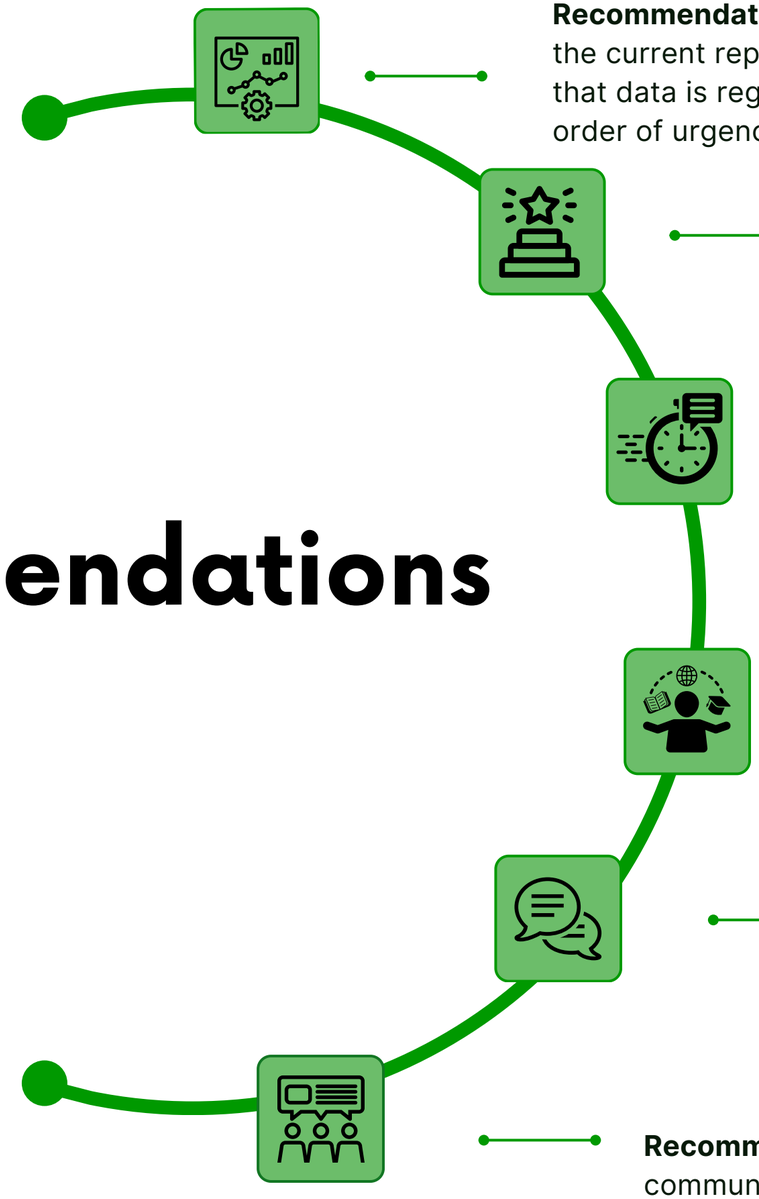
Continue to review and update policies to ensure they align with equity, inclusion, and diversity goals. Facilitate campaigns to educate stakeholders on clear protocols for reporting incidents of hate, oppression, and discrimination.

12. Evaluation and Accountability

Establish clear benchmarks/key performance indicators and goals for equity, diversity, and inclusion, while regularly evaluating progress. Hold district leadership and stakeholders accountable for upholding the principles of the framework.

DHOF

Recommendations



Recommendation 1: There needs to be a clear, accessible, and barrier-free access to the current reporting mechanism for all stakeholders. This will be a key step in ensuring that data is regularly collected, acknowledged, triaged/ categorized, and actioned in the order of urgency.

Recommendation 2: Systemic access to and usage of data across all schools, content areas and measures of student success. That would enable a tiered support system where common processes are created to monitor student success outcomes based on academics, social, emotional, and behavioural variables at all levels.

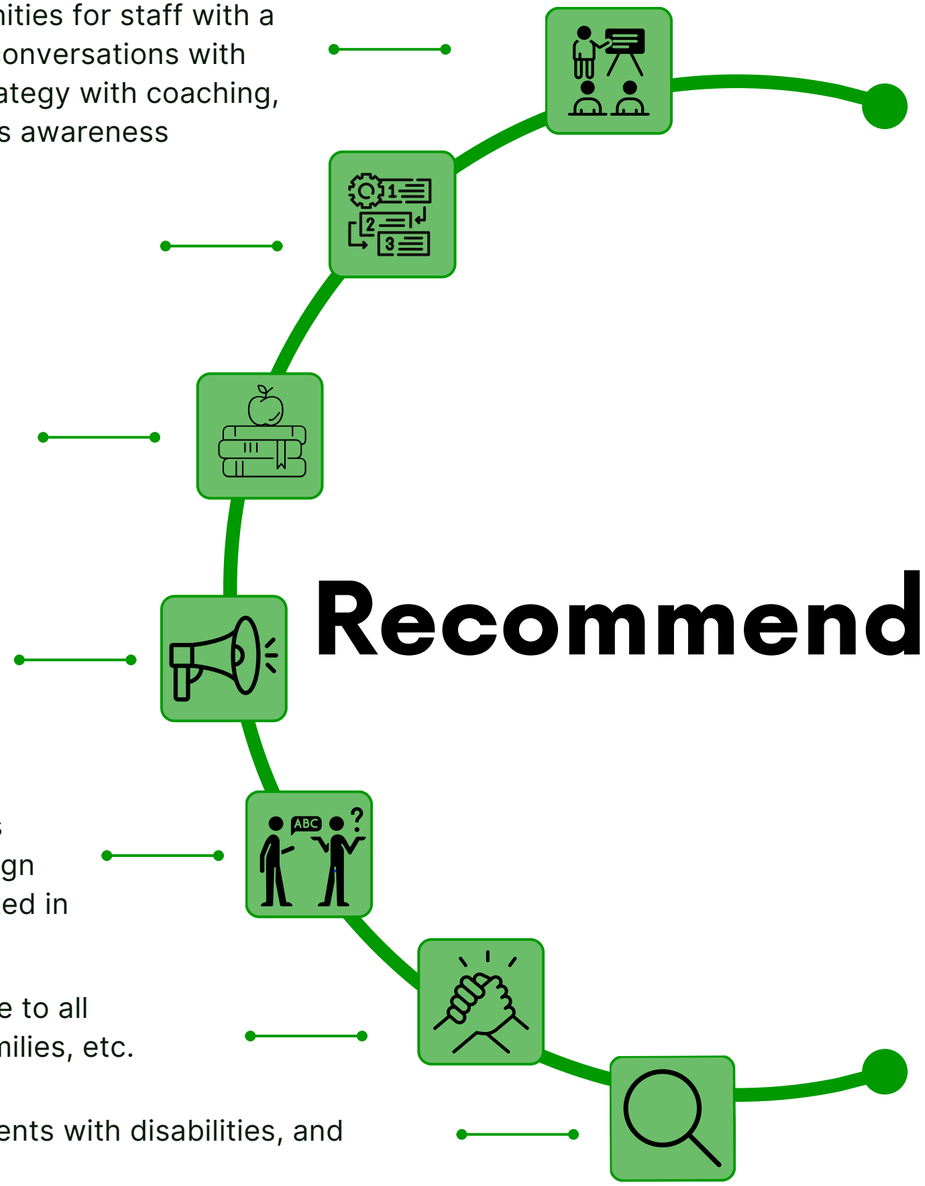
Recommendation 3: Systemize how the school responds to incidents of hate, racism, oppression, and discrimination, allowing the Board to distinguish the incidents, the risk factors and individual/ collective impact, and respond to complaints using a tiered level of support approach.

Recommendation 4: Create a district-wide arc of professional learning using a work-within-industry4 model that sets clear expectations for what effective, culturally responsive, and personalized learning looks like for students at all grades and levels and staff expectations.

Recommendation 5: Develop family communication and engagement expectations systemically with specific expectations for disproportionately affected individuals, especially vulnerable students such as multiple language learners, non-native English and French speakers, low-income families, as well as other groups including Indigenous, Black, individuals living with disabilities and the 2SLGBTQIA+, especially the transgender community which is receiving a significant amount of hate.

Recommendation 6: Ensure continuous consultation with family committees and community partners for feedback and input on matters affecting the diverse population.

Recommendations



Recommendation 7: Continue investing in equity-focused learning opportunities for staff with a focus on connecting equity to instructional practice and navigating critical conversations with staff, students, and families. Creation of an equity-focused instructional strategy with coaching, observation, mentoring and opportunities for honest feedback. This includes awareness workshops and learning opportunities.

Recommendation 8: Develop and implement a Dismantling hate, oppression, and discrimination, implementation plan that encapsulates the varied concerns and feedback from the stakeholders in the following underrepresented and underserved communities.

Recommendation 9: Embed actions to dismantle hate, oppression, and discrimination in the current School Improvement Plan. Create an auditing tool to complement the dismantling hate, oppression, and discrimination implementation plan for ongoing monitoring of the progress of current equity strategies, reporting structures and impending policies to support inclusion and equity.

Recommendation 10: Build awareness, buy-in and investment in the YRDSB's equity-focused efforts, through consistent communication channels and targeted community engagement, by highlighting the motivation and benefits for the plans, while addressing implicit and explicit bias at the source.

Recommendation 11: Identify and remove barriers to students' access to, and participation in, curricular and co-curricular activities to ensure that all students have access. Encourage culturally inclusive classrooms through curriculum design and development, thus ensuring that all students can see themselves represented in classroom instruction and activities.

Recommendation 12: Examine the instructional supports and programs available to all vulnerable students, including those living with disabilities, from low-income families, etc.

Recommendation 13: Systematically examine the current needs of students with disabilities, and the YRDSB's responses, including culturally responsive programs.