



# INDIGENOUS EDUCATION AND EQUITY STRATEGY

## CONTEXT

The York Region District School Board (YRDSB) is committed to student achievement and well-being by working to ensure equitable access and outcomes through accessible and inclusive learning and working environments. YRDSB recognizes that Indigenous students and students of diverse social identities have been historically marginalized by systemic barriers and may be underserved which results in varying levels of underperformance and gaps in student achievement and well-being. Ongoing collection of data from multiple sources will help align resources to support our schools; identify and eliminate systemic barriers to student success; create more equitable and inclusive school environments; and improve student achievement and well-being. At the YRDSB, we work to identify and implement strategies that center marginalized voices and student agency to deepen the understanding of the social identities and lived experiences of all learners including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities. We have a collective responsibility to close gaps through explicit and deliberate actions which are grounded in human rights, the Calls to Action from the national Truth and Reconciliation Commission which reflect the principles of equity and inclusive education.

The Indigenous Education and Equity Strategy provides direction for actions in classrooms, schools and the system to foster the development of high levels of critical consciousness and transformative practice that fulfill the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, foster accessible and equitable schools and classrooms and improve outcomes for all students.

At the system, school and classroom levels, YRDSB will build a collective understanding of:

- the ongoing impact of colonialism on Indigenous Communities;
- anti-oppression; and
- [Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy \(CRRP\)](#).

We will provide learning environments which raise the achievement and well-being of our underserved students by:

- building knowledge and capacity;
- focusing on learning, teaching and assessment;
- disrupting oppression; and
- engaging families, guardians and communities.

[Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#) provides direction for actions in classrooms, schools and the system to engage students and staff in authentic, relevant and deep learning that enables all YRDSB spaces to be safe, inclusive, equitable, engaging and empowering for First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, where:

- Indigenous languages are supported and honoured;
- Indigenous perspectives, beliefs and ways of doing things are respected and valued;
- Indigenous ways of thinking are promoted and integrated into practice;
- There is pride in Indigenous culture and history;
- Indigenous students are advocates who contribute and relate to collective identity and community in a good way;
- Indigenous students feel it is safe and valuable to self-identify through the board process of self-identification; and
- All students are empowered to be autonomous, reflective and collaborative learners who are prepared to live and contribute in a modern world through independent thinking and learning.



## BUILDING KNOWLEDGE AND CAPACITY

*Building knowledge and capacity* involves understanding that inequitable structures, policies and practices create barriers which negatively affect student access to programming, achievement and well-being. All stakeholders will acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to foster inclusive and responsive learning spaces. Capacity building is informed by the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#) as well as evidence-based, equitable and inclusive practices, programs and pedagogies for equitable and inclusive education.

### ACTIONS

#### System

Identify strategies that foster voice and agency to deepen the understanding of social identities and lived experiences of all learners including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities

Build a collective understanding of colonialism, informed by Indigenous perspectives and its ongoing impact on Indigenous communities. Build an understanding of anti-oppression and [Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy \(CRRP\)](#) through professional conversations and the development of professional learning opportunities and resources

Develop an anti-oppressive approach to the collection, analysis and use of identity-based data which will support schools and departments in planning, monitoring and reflecting on practices and resource allocation that support achievement for all underserved and underperforming students

Review, develop, communicate and be accountable to policies, procedures, guidelines and processes in order to ensure accessibility, equity and inclusivity (e.g., faith accommodations, all gender washrooms and all gender athletics, discipline, hiring)

Remain informed by current global trends and research to anticipate system leadership requirements in order to build and sustain an accessible, equitable and inclusive organization

#### School

Develop and deepen critical consciousness through co-learning opportunities, school improvement processes and professional conversations

Engage whole school and collaborative school teams in professional learning related to Indigenous education, colonialism, anti-oppression and equity

Engage in learning about the history of residential schools, treaties and present day colonialism to understand their impact on education and to build capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy and mutual respect

Engage in co-learning on how [Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy \(CRRP\)](#) supports anti-oppression practices that are foundational to creating and implementing inclusive programming, practices and spaces in school communities

Develop an understanding of anti-oppressive analysis of school based data and the use of identity data to identify and eliminate barriers for marginalized groups

Explore and use diverse resources to support the Indigenous Education and Equity Strategy (e.g., Equity Action Plan, Teaching in a Good Way)

Identify an Indigenous Education and Equity Designate to support staff learning and awareness of system initiatives

#### Classroom

Examine and interrogate classroom practices based on an understanding of multiple social identities, positionality, and school based data analysis to create accessible, equitable, and inclusive classrooms

Deepen understanding of the social identities and lived experiences of all learners, including English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, to foster student voice and agency

Develop understanding of Indigenous identities, communities and histories through collaborative and self-directed learning

Develop understanding of socio-cultural consciousness through [Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy \(CRRP\)](#) in order to support engagement, mattering and belonging



## LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

*Learning, teaching and assessment* involve practices that are reflective and responsive to students' social identities and employs Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy. Such practices must intentionally interrupt barriers to learning and well-being while fostering inclusivity, accessibility and equitable outcomes for all students including English language learners and students with disabilities.

### ACTIONS

#### System

Consult with Indigenous communities to develop and implement age-appropriate cross-curricular resources on the legacy of residential schools, the impact of Treaties and Indigenous peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada

Understand and implement Policy 261.8 Religious Accommodations, A Framework for Responding to Requests for Religious Accommodations and Policy 407 Accessibility

Create resources to support educators in understanding and implementing [Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy \(CRRP\)](#) which reflect the interconnectedness of the key characteristics of CRRP

Develop a framework to support educators in reflecting on their assessment practices to identify and address biases that have created barriers

Design tools (e.g., criteria checklist) that assess learning resources to ensure they are accessible and reflect diverse social identities and that identify and address oppressive representations or teachings

Develop criteria and training to ensure students' pathway choices are supported through a renewed approach to academic and applied course selections

Develop guidelines for the system and for schools in order to make all gender spaces available (e.g., all gender washrooms, changerooms)

#### School

Develop an understanding of how to use the Ontario curriculum and YRDSB resources to respond to and support students' social identities, centre Indigenous education and engage in social justice learning

Implement the renewed approach to academic and applied course selections to ensure students' pathway choices are supported

Ensure the implementation of faith-based program accommodations across the school (e.g., spiritual expression including traditional tobacco, attire, spaces, school processes, events, field trips)

Apply [Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy \(CRRP\)](#) to inform school culture, practices and the allocation of resources

Ensure the implementation of accommodations for gender identity (e.g., all gender washrooms, gender safe changerooms) and ability-based accommodations across the school (e.g., field trips, Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) compliant resources and wheelchair accessibility)

#### Classroom

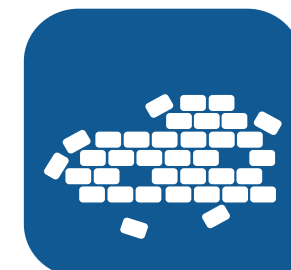
Use knowledge of the social identities and lived experiences of the learners to create a classroom environment that is physically, socially, spiritually and academically inclusive and accessible to all

Make connections between Indigenous worldviews and the Ontario curriculum in order to foster relationships to the land and nature

Design learning that integrates students' social identities and experiences across subject areas and grades in an anti-oppressive manner

Integrate strategies for using the characteristics of [Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy \(CRRP\)](#) in teaching, learning and assessment

Provide equitable and inclusive student leadership opportunities to all students, particularly to those with social identities that have been historically marginalized



## DISRUPTING OPPRESSION

*Disrupting oppression* involves identifying and addressing organizational structures, policies, programs and practices (e.g., discipline, streaming, hiring, parent engagement) that uphold power and privilege and maintain anti-Indigenous racism, anti-black racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism, classism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism.

### ACTIONS

#### System

Interrogate and remove systemic barriers to well-being and achievement for underserved students through an anti-oppressive analysis of policies and procedures

Create resources to support system and school leaders to analyse and understand patterns of marginalization and systemic oppression within and across multiple sources of data including identity-based data and incident reports (e.g., hate crimes, discrimination reports)

Provide resources and professional learning to school staff to combat incidents of hate, intolerance and discrimination (e.g., anti-Indigenous racism, anti-black racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism, classism, homophobia, transphobia and ableism)

Develop and implement a protocol to recognize and respond to hate, intolerance and discrimination

Develop, implement and promote accessible tools for reporting, documenting and responding to incidents of hate, intolerance and discrimination in a timely manner (e.g., REPORT IT button, online Safe School Incident Report, Barrier Buster)

Suggest innovative approaches for the dedication of respectful spaces for prayer, smudging, devotion, or meditation activities for students, families, communities and staff in all board and school spaces in alignment with the revised Program Accommodations For Faith Purposes: A Guideline for Religious Accommodation

#### School

Seek out, value and be responsive to the voices and experiences of staff, students, families and communities of identities historically marginalized by structures and practices in schools

Use system provided tools and student data when examining environments, structures, practices and resources in order to identify and eliminate barriers to accessibility, well-being and achievement for those of historically marginalized identities

Use and promote protocols, resources and tools to intentionally respond to and document incidents of hate and intolerance which undermine inclusion, well-being and mental health

Foster and support identity-based student [affinity groups](#) to create safe and inclusive spaces for students

Use innovative approaches to dedicate respectful spaces for prayer, smudging, devotion or meditation activities for students, families, communities and staff in all board and school spaces in alignment with the revised Program Accommodations For Faith Purposes: A Guideline for Religious Accommodation

#### Classroom

Develop own and others' capacity to listen to marginalized voices with the intention to learn and understand

Identify and address biases and barriers in the physical, academic and social learning environments in partnership with students, families and communities

Use protocols, resources and tools to interrupt and respond to incidents of hate and intolerance

Engage in age-appropriate (K-12) learning on anti-colonialism and anti-oppression to develop students' understanding of hate, intolerance and discrimination and their manifestations in interactions, beliefs and systems



## ENGAGING FAMILIES, GUARDIANS AND COMMUNITIES

*We engage families, guardians and communities* when we build trusting relationships with them and when we understand and are responsive to their assets, lived experiences, perspectives and needs particularly for those harmed and/or marginalized by the education system.

### ACTIONS

#### System

Identify and use intentional strategies to seek out and value the voices and experiences of families, guardians and communities, traditionally marginalized by structures and practices, to develop responsive and inclusive system practices

Create and revise policies, procedures and practices to effectively support the inclusion of First Nations, Métis and Inuit partnerships and relationships with families, guardians and communities

Increase community partnerships with Indigenous and culturally responsive and/or culturally specific organizations with competency in anti-oppressive practices to address the well-being and achievement of traditionally marginalized identities

Make information available and promote the Board's equity, inclusivity and human rights services in a variety of languages and in alternative formats for accessibility

Revise current strategies to ensure representation of diverse and intersectional identities on Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), Parent and Family Engagement Advisory Committee (PEAC), Equity and Inclusivity Advisory Committee (EIAC) and school councils

Partner with families, guardians and communities to foster reciprocal learning about equity, accessibility and inclusivity

Offer safe spaces, that affirm diversity, belonging and identity, where all First Nation, Métis and Inuit people experience cultural and linguistic inclusion

#### School

Ensure that diverse and intersectional identities are represented and valued in the social, physical and academic environment of the school to promote positive relationships with all families, guardians and community members

Engage with local Indigenous communities and families to integrate authentic experiences and content

Foster a school-community collaborative approach to identify and address discriminatory biases and systemic barriers and to promote student achievement and well-being

Provide ongoing culturally responsive and relevant opportunities for open dialogue with students, families and communities

Use the revised system strategies for parent and community engagement to ensure representation of diverse and intersectional identities on school councils

Plan and implement school events that are accessible and responsive to the diversity of identities and abilities in the school community

#### Classroom

Partner with Indigenous families and communities to design environments that are physically, socially and academically safe, supportive and inclusive for all Indigenous identities

Implement practices in the classroom that enable the diversity of student voices through instruction, self-advocacy and home-school connections

Actively engage with families in a culturally responsive and relevant manner to promote positive connections between home and classroom and to create a sense of belonging for all students

Engage and include student, parent/guardian and community voices and experiences to inform the planning, instruction, assessment and decision-making processes

## RESOURCES

Aligning resources effectively, purposefully and efficiently to focus on what matters most is a key leadership function. Resources have been identified to support the implementation of the Indigenous Education and Equity Strategy.

They are organized into categories:

- [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action](#)
- Provincial
- Regional
- Classroom
- Research
- Indigenous Specific

Indigenous Education and Equity Strategy Resources