



Using an Equity Lens

A Guide to Creating Equitable and Inclusive School Environments





Acknowledgments

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Using Equity as a Lens

Applying an 'equity' lens to all our policies and procedures provides a mechanism that allows the school community to reflect upon its own practices and provides strategies that assist in achieving outcomes expected to result from policy implementation.

Equity is not achieved by providing identical treatment to everyone regardless of his or her individual circumstances. Equity is achieved when differences are acknowledged and the stories, ideas and experiences of our students and their families are recognized as valuable learning tools that benefit everyone.

"In a truly equitable system, factors such as race, gender and socio-economic status do not prevent students from achieving ambitious outcomes. Our experience shows that barriers can be removed when all education partners create the conditions needed for success."

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 8)

Guiding Principles of the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy *(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 11)*

Equity and inclusive education:

- is a foundation of excellence
- meets individual needs
- identifies and eliminates barriers
- promotes a sense of belonging
- involves the broad community
- builds on and enhances previous and existing initiatives
- is demonstrated throughout the system.

Using an Equity Lens





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Introduction

This document has been developed as a guide for school staff and for all who work with students of Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB). It recognizes that individuals may walk along different pathways towards a common destination or goal, and that goal is to provide a future in which all students achieve their full potential.

This *Guide to Creating Equitable and Inclusive School Environments* provides an approach that ties together the HWDSB Equity Policy, *Equity Policy Guiding Principles* and *Equity Policy Supporting Guidelines with the Ministry's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, *School Improvement Plans*, *School Effectiveness Framework*, *Student Success Character Education*, *Safe Schools* and *Bullying Prevention and Intervention* initiatives. All of these are circumscribed by the Ontario Human Rights Code and other Equity affirming Provincial Legislations, and links policy, guidelines and practice in a way that enhances the confidence of schools to meet the needs of all students equitably.

The *Equity Policy Guiding Principles* are the organizing feature of this *Guide to Creating Equitable and Inclusive School Environments*. Each Guiding Principle is taken from the HWDSB Equity Policy and reflects the Board's commitment to Equity principles. This *Guide to Creating Equitable and Inclusive School Environments* provides a mechanism that allows the school community to reflect upon its own practices and provides strategies that assist in achieving outcomes expected to result from policy implementation.

Each Section has four components:

- 1. Statement of Guiding Principle** as contained in HWDSB's Equity Policy.
This provides the relevant principle upon which the section is based.
- 2. Theory and Context** underlying the Guiding Principle and identification of links to the Legislation, Character Education and other policies.
This provides some context for understanding the Guiding Principles.
- 3. Reflection Questions**
This provides questions to guide an examination of the school's practices as they relate to the Guiding Principles.
- 4. Organizer**
OUTCOMES – resulting from implementing the Guiding Principles.
STRATEGIES – suggestions for achieving identified outcomes.
CONNECTIONS – how the principles relate to School Improvement Plans and other initiatives.
RESOURCES – listing of supporting documents and reference materials.
This assists in the examination of practices relating to the Guiding Principles.

School Climate/Physical Environment

Guiding Principle

1.0 The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board is committed to ensuring Equity in all policies, guidelines and operating practices.

Theory and Context

A supportive and inclusive learning environment is one that acknowledges the life experiences and perspectives of all learners and that of the wider community. What students see and hear within the learning environment has long term impact on how students feel, it affects learning and influences behaviour.

“How a school looks and feels reflects its attitudes and priorities. Inclusive schools work hard to acknowledge diversity in the routines of school life. This means that staff members embed in all aspects of school life the histories and the experience of all members of the school's racial and ethnic cultural community.”

An equitable and inclusive school environment promotes the development of a respect for human diversity and an appreciation for democratic values. It requires a major sustained commitment to the creation of a learning environment conducive to learning for all. This can be accomplished if there is a shared understanding and commitment to a clearly articulated school mission. Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board has clearly stated Vision, Mission and Values Statements which should be evident and visible to all who come into contact with the school, and understood by all stakeholders.

Vision: All students achieving their full potential.

Mission: Providing relevant, responsive education so that each student becomes a life-long learner and contributing citizen in a diverse world.

Values: Respect, Creativity, Excellence, Citizenship

Reflection Questions

1. Does the Mission/Vision/Values of the school reflect Equity principles?
2. What are the initiatives in place that fosters equitable and inclusive school environment?
3. How are administration, staff, community and students involved in the development of school policies and goals?
4. How can displays in the school be more inclusive and reflective of diversity?
5. How does the school know if parents/guardians and community members feel welcome and comfortable in the school setting?
6. What can be done to make all parents/guardians and community members feel welcome and comfortable in the school setting?

EQUITY DEPARTMENT

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© York Region District School Board, 2006, Ensuring Student Success: Action Plan Initiatives for an Antiracist School.

School Climate/Physical Environment

Organizer

EXPECTED OUTCOMES	USEFUL STRATEGIES	SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND OTHER INITIATIVES	RESOURCES
All school displays include and reflect Canada's diverse communities.	- Reflect inclusion in visual displays in halls and classrooms - Ensure that visual displays reflect all groups respectfully, accurately and appropriately - Visually display calendars that recognize significant religious days for the multi-faith community	- S.I.P. - Community, Culture and Caring - Bullying Awareness and Prevention - Character Builds Initiative - Acceptance/Citizenship - Respect	- Holy Days calendar - Student work - Community resources (Settlement and Integration Services Organization and Hamilton's Centre for Civic Inclusion)

EQUITY DEPARTMENT

Understanding Equity

“Equity is the condition or state of fair, inclusive and respectful treatment for all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for differences.”
(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 11)

Equity is not achieved by providing identical treatment to everyone regardless of his or her individual circumstance. Equity is achieved when differences are acknowledged and the stories, ideas, and experiences of our students and their families are recognized as valuable learning tools that benefit everyone. This document is intended to assist schools in achieving Equity, opening the channels to communication and listening to the voices of our diverse community.

Shared Responsibility

Diversity is as ever-present as the air we breathe. To ask, ‘Do you believe in Diversity?’ is tantamount to asking ‘Do you believe in the sun?’. Diversity is something to believe in. It exists. Look around you and see diversity everywhere you turn.

(Culturally Proficient Instruction: A Guide for People Who Teach. p. 125)

The goal of achieving equitable outcomes for students is a responsibility to be shared between Ministry of Education, School Boards and the entire School Community – students, parents/guardians, teachers, administrators, support staff, trustees and members of the community at large. Each stakeholder has an important role to play and contribution to make so that efforts to provide Equity of outcome for students are successful.

The Ministry’s Vision

We envision an inclusive education system in Ontario in which:

- all students, parents, and other members of the school community are welcomed and respected
- every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning

To achieve an equitable and inclusive school climate, school boards and schools will strive to ensure that all members of the school community feel safe, comfortable, and accepted. We want all staff and students to value diversity and to demonstrate respect for others and a commitment to establishing a just, caring society. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 10)

Building Healthy Community Relations

An inclusive, equitable school environment understands and respects the diverse linguistic, cultural, and faith traditions of students and their families. It takes into consideration the importance of times and dates of religious observances, the schedules of family members and cultural traditions of the school population. It ensures that messages communicated to students, staff, parents, guardians and community are clear, easily understood, culturally appropriate and consistent. These messages can be transmitted to the school community both nonverbally and verbally by using a variety of languages, signs, posters and visual displays. An open, accessible and comfortable reception area helps in conveying the message that the school is a warm and caring place in which students, parents and guardians feel safe, and respected.

As communities become more diverse, different perspectives and world-views come to light. Community values change and school practices and norms, once thought to be appropriate, may no longer address students’ needs in the changing environment. Therefore, schools, and educational systems should become Centres of Equity and adjust to meet new and emerging challenges, provide students with opportunities for success and support them as they try to do so. Students need to believe that they are equitably treated within their school and have access to all the supports they need to be successful. Learning and educational materials should reflect the broad diversity within society and enable students to feel that they are active participants in their learning processes. When schools become Centres of Equity they provide stakeholders with the ability to gain access to an equitable share of goods and services found in society.

Using an Equity Lens



Improvement Planning

Using This Document to Assist in School Improvement Planning

This document is designed to support schools in the implementation of the *Equity Policy* through its School Improvement Plan. The graphic to the right depicts the School Improvement Planning process in the context of building and sustaining an effective school.

Using the Board's Building Capacity model, the formation of a learning team to lead this initiative at the school level is recommended. The learning team can champion Equity throughout the school and model a commitment to creating an inclusive school environment.



Study Phase

In the Study Phase a learning team could:

1. Identify potential areas of study for the school by reading the document
2. Select a priority area in consultation with the school administrator
3. Use the “Questions for Reflection” to identify Equity issues and concerns in the school
4. Identify a priority issue or concern to address
5. Use the outcomes organizer to consider and identify goals
6. Prepare for the Plan Phase by connecting the goals to the school SIP

Plan Phase

In the Plan Phase, it is recommended to use the SMART Goals framework of SIP to plan for implementation. The following chart provides a template that can be used for planning (an example is also provided). The learning team's goal has been identified in the Study Phase. Now it is vital to work through the framework below from left to right.

The following recommendations may support that process:

- Develop indicators that would demonstrate the goal
- Identify measures for the indicators
- Consider modifying the strategies identified in the Outcomes organizer to suit the unique conditions of the school
- Create a communication plan to ensure all stakeholders (staff, students and community) are aware of the initiative
- Identify the resources from the Outcomes organizer that would support the initiative and additional resources that are required
- Set short- and long-term timelines

Improvement Planning

Using an Equity Lens

Areas of Focus

Goal – (SMART) Strategic + Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results Focused, Time Relevant

Strategies – Specific Human & Material Resources needed as well as Specific Activities.
What steps will we take to get to the end goal? How will we have to change in our outlook and our practice? What P.D. is needed? What materials are needed?

Responsibility – Who will do it? Teachers, School Council, Parents/Guardians, E.A.s, Administration

Timelines – When will we review this item?

Review – Was the goal achieved? Next Steps.

Action Phase

In this phase the initiative is implemented and data is collected to measure its effectiveness. Barriers and issues arise often in this phase and the learning team needs to meet to review data and make changes to the plan where applicable.

Monitor and Review

In this phase, the learning team assesses the initiative as a whole by considering the measurements they put in place. Key questions regarding the next steps in the initiative can be summed up in this simple framework:

- **Start** – what new strategies do we need to continue to implement the Equity Policy?
- **Stop** – what do we stop now because it is complete, unnecessary or unsustainable?
- **Continue** – what part of the initiative can and should be continued?

The answers to these questions can restart the process outlined above as they move the learning team back into the Study Phase as they consider how to implement “Start” pieces and how to sustain the “Continue” pieces.

School Climate/Physical Environment

Guiding Principle

1.0 The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board is committed to ensuring Equity in all policies, guidelines and operating practices.

Theory and Context

A supportive and inclusive learning environment is one that acknowledges the life experiences and perspectives of all learners and that of the wider community. What students see and hear within the learning environment has long term impact on how students feel, it affects learning and influences behaviour.

“How a school looks and feels reflects its attitudes and priorities. Inclusive schools work hard to acknowledge...diversity in the routines of school life. This means that staff members embed in all aspects of school life the histories and the experience of all members of the school's racial and ethno cultural community.”
(York Region District School Board, 2006)

An equitable and inclusive school environment promotes the development of a respect for human diversity and an appreciation for democratic values. It requires a major sustained commitment to the creation of a learning environment conducive to learning for all. This can be accomplished if there is a shared understanding and commitment to a clearly articulated school mission. Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board has clearly stated Vision, Mission and Values Statements which should be evident and visible to all who come into contact with the school, and understood by all stakeholders.

Vision: All students achieving their full potential.

Mission: Providing relevant, responsive education so that each student becomes a life-long learner and contributing citizen in a diverse world.

Values: Respect, Creativity, Excellence, Citizenship

Reflection Questions

1. Does the Mission/Vision/Values of the school reflect Equity principles?
2. What are the initiatives in place that foster an equitable and inclusive school environment?
3. How are administration, staff, community and students involved in the development of school policies and goals?
4. How can displays in the school be more inclusive and reflective of diversity?
5. How does the school know if parents/guardians and community members feel welcome and comfortable in the school setting?
6. What can be done to make all parents/guardians and community members feel welcome and comfortable in the school setting?

School Climate/Physical Environment

Using an Equity Lens

Organizer

EXPECTED OUTCOMES	USEFUL STRATEGIES	SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND OTHER INITIATIVES	RESOURCES
All school displays include and reflect Canada's diverse communities.	- Reflect inclusion in visual displays in halls and classrooms - Ensure that visual displays reflect all groups respectfully, accurately and appropriately - Visually display calendars that recognize significant religious days for the multi-faith community	S.I.P. – Community, Culture and Caring Bullying Awareness and Prevention <i>Character Builds Initiative:</i> - Acceptance/ Citizenship - Respect	Holy Days calendar Student work Community resources (Settlement and Integration Services Organization and Hamilton's Centre for Civic Inclusion)
Parents/guardians and community members feel validated and welcome to enter and participate in schools activities.	- Develop a consistent welcoming reception procedure (particularly for newcomers) - Reception process is welcoming and communicated clearly to parents/guardians and community members through signage, posters and newsletters - Indicate that the school is a positive/safe space	S.I.P. – Community, Culture and Caring Safe Schools/Bullying Prevention	<i>Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development: A Resource Manual for Elementary Schools</i>
Schools mission statement reflects Equity principles.	- Involve all stakeholders in the creation of the school's vision/mission/values statement - Display the school's vision/mission/values statement and ensure that it is communicated to all clearly	S.I.P. – Community, Culture and Caring	www.settlement.org Newcomer Guides to Elementary and Secondary Schools in multiple languages



Leadership

Guiding Principle

2.0 The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board is committed to providing leadership at all levels that fosters an equitable environment.

Theory and Context

Instructional Leadership extends the role of the Principal beyond instructional leadership to being a leader of leaders. This broadened concept recognizes that schools are complex organizations within which leadership burdens cannot be carried by a single individual only, but should be dispersed to all adults, especially teachers, in the school setting. The role of the Principal then becomes one of creating a “community of shared values” and creating an environment for sharing values according to the school’s vision and mission. While organizational leadership remains a function of the principal, leadership is a delegated requirement of all teachers. This approach is consistent with the development of School Improvement Plans. To apply this approach effectively, it would be useful for individual reflection on the following questions. For the purposes of this document, Leadership is considered to be “The Board of Trustees, Senior Administration and any person placed in a position of added responsibility within the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board”.

(Glossary of Terms, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board Equity Policy)

Reflection Questions

1. How does the school apply Equity Guiding Principles to daily operations?
2. How does the school provide opportunities for all school members to increase their knowledge and understanding of Equity principles and issues?
3. How does the school provide opportunities for school members to increase their leadership capacity in areas related to Equity?
4. Does the school provide Equity training/resources for school leaders and administrators?
5. How does the system assist school leaders and administrators in gaining access to Equity staff development resources?
6. How do system staff from all departments support Equity principles at the school level?

Organizer

EXPECTED OUTCOMES	USEFUL STRATEGIES	SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND OTHER INITIATIVES	RESOURCES
School policies and procedures reflect Equity Guiding Principles.	- Provide information to staff and community re: Equity In-services, and resources - Provide translations for all relevant school policies, procedures. (e.g., safe arrival, absences, Code of Conduct) - Invite Equity staff and leaders, community members, and agencies to provide information on cultural issues - Use the SIP process to review existing policies, practices and procedures using an Equity lens	S.I.P. – Environment <i>Character Builds:</i> - Acceptance - Caring - Empathy	Settlement Integration Services Organization Board Personnel Equity links <i>FirstClass</i> Conference <i>Leading for Diversity</i> by R. Henze, A. Katz, E. Norte, S. Sather and E. Walker
All school community members are invited to share and be involved with development of Equity principles and issues.	- Provide opportunities at monthly staff meetings to share knowledge/ issues/concerns/expertise re: Equity Principles - Invite community to share at School Council meetings, and other formal and informal information sessions - Provide student leadership opportunities regarding Equity issues/committees - Give staff equal opportunities to participate in school-based Equity committees - Provide appropriate P.D. to staff, students and community - Investigate alternative settings for dialogue and outreach programs for community participation	S.I.P. – Environment <i>Character Builds:</i> - Caring - Integrity - Responsibility - Acceptance	
School leaders and administrators have the knowledge, skills and experience to implement Equity principles at the school level.	- Provide opportunities at cluster meetings to share knowledge/ issues/concerns/expertise re: Equity Principles - Provide appropriate Equity P.D. to administrators and school leaders		
System staff at all levels understand and provide support for Equity implementation at all levels.	- Provide opportunities for school and system leaders to share best practices and knowledge about Equity issues - Draw upon System resources to assist in the design and implementation of Equity initiatives		

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School Community Partnership

Guiding Principle

- 3.0 The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board will recognize and promote active participation with all members of school communities in order to maintain and affect equitable educational policies, practices and outcomes.**

Theory and Context

The school/community partnerships developed by a school recognize the diversity (linguistic, cultural, socio-economic, faith, etc.) of the community it serves. They reflect the school's internal and external environment. These partnerships build trust and effective communication between parents/guardians and teachers because they have a common goal in seeking positive outcomes for their children. Both the school and the home are integral parts of the community and therefore the partnership between the teacher and the parent/guardian cannot be developed effectively without a similar relationship between the school and the community at large. The basic mission of an effective school is understood and supported by parents/guardians who are given an opportunity to play a role in helping the school achieve its mission.

While parent/guardian participation can be achieved through formally established groups such as school councils and home and school associations, other equally valuable avenues for parent engagement should also be explored. Alternative, less formal avenues for parent engagement are just as valuable as the formal ones and are often more inviting and rewarding for parents/guardians. For example, schools can provide alternative times to the school day for dialogue and provide informal information sessions to address concerns regarding school initiatives. This knowledge will enable a school to facilitate and develop programs and activities that include all students and address and remove barriers that may prevent full and effective participation in school activities and the life of the school.

Reflection Questions

1. What does the school know and understand about the social, cultural and economic context of the community?
2. What does the school know and understand about the social, cultural and economic pressures that affect the lives and perspectives of students and families within the school community?
3. Has the school tried to identify barriers that may exist between the school and community?
4. How does the school address and remove identified barriers?
5. What does the school consider to be positive and proactive dialogue with the community and how is it promoted and established?
6. How does the school meet the needs (social, socio-economic, cultural, health-care, etc.) of its school community?
7. What opportunities has the school provided to assist the school community to learn about their rights, responsibilities and obligations as stakeholders in education?
8. How does the school measure the level of trust between the school and the community?
9. If levels of trust are low, what are the causes of this situation and what actions can be taken to rebuild trust?

School Community Partnership

Organizer

EXPECTED OUTCOMES	USEFUL STRATEGIES	SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND OTHER INITIATIVES	RESOURCES
The school develops a full and comprehensive knowledge of the community, background, dynamics and environment from which its students are derived. The school has a clear awareness and understanding of community expectations.	- Collect data using surveys and other data collection tools and employing both formal and informal methods and dialogue - Gather information through formal and informal dialogue with community leaders - Recognize and respect community structures with the understanding that communities may have more than one leader	S.I.P. - Community, Culture and Caring <i>Character Builds:</i> - Initiative - Respect - Empathy - Caring - Acceptance	Settlement and Integration Services Organization Hamilton's Centre for Civic Inclusion Settlement Workers In Schools – Hamilton Home School Organizations Cultural Interpretation Services Newcomer Guides
Opportunities are provided for parents/guardians and community groups to learn about their rights, responsibilities and obligations as they relate to their child/children in school. Effective and culturally sensitive bridges to the community are built which facilitates open, honest and inclusive dialogue between the school and the community.	- Provide culturally sensitive and appropriate information to community through newsletters, formal and informal dialogue and information sessions - Develop outreach activities and provide information in a community setting, for example – make presentations at libraries and community centres		
The School Council reflects the diversity of the school community and is actively involved in school decision-making processes.	- Provide information in plain language to the diverse community members that engages them and invites them to participate in School Councils	S.I.P. : - Safe and Orderly Community, Culture and Caring - Home-School Relations <i>Safe Schools Legislation</i>	
Accommodations are made to enable full participation of parents/guardians at School Council meetings.	- Identify and remove barriers that may hinder the full participation of any parents/guardians at School Council meetings – Provide supports that would encourage parents/guardians to attend School Council and other parent focussed meetings.		Child care support Language/translation support

Using an Equity Lens



Curriculum

Guiding Principle

4.0 The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board will support the curriculum learning materials and school material and practices which reflect and include the principles of Equity as regulated by the Ministry of Education.

Theory and Context

The curriculum encompasses “all learning experiences the student will have in school. These include school environment, interactions among students, staff and the community, and the values, attitudes and behaviours conveyed by the school.” (*Glossary of Terms, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board Equity Policy*) The curriculum therefore provides an operational framework for learning and influences both the learning environment and materials used within it. The use of inclusive curricula will result in inclusive school environments which use/employ relevant and appropriate bias-free learning materials. Differentiated Instruction is required to ensure that instruction is appropriate, relevant and mastered by the student. While individual teachers may not have direct control over the Ontario Curriculum as provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education, teachers do have some control over texts, references, assignments, projects, examples and other materials used in the classroom. Inclusive instructional materials recognize, respect and validate a student’s ethnocultural and linguistic background and allow students to see themselves inside the curriculum.

The *Equity Policy Guiding Principles* are also relevant to *Character Builds* Initiatives. These initiatives provide a useful framework for examining curricular components relating to interactions among students and assist students to develop caring and understanding for each other and the community in which they live. For example, schools can use materials that present alternate viewpoints in Social Studies which would be linked to the following character attributes: respect, citizenship, empathy and caring. To reflect on how Equity components are integrated into the curriculum, the following questions need to be considered.

Reflection Questions

1. How does the school develop processes and procedures for reviewing learning materials for bias?
2. How does the school involve staff, students, and community in examining learning materials for bias?
3. How does the school integrate Equity principles into its delivery of the Ontario Curriculum?
4. How does the school demonstrate that skills, such as critical thinking, are developed at all grade levels and enable students to examine issues of bias and discrimination?
5. What is the staff’s commitment to Differentiated Instruction and are lessons differentiated to address the learning profiles of all students?

Organizer

EXPECTED OUTCOMES	USEFUL STRATEGIES	SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND OTHER INITIATIVES	RESOURCES
Staff, students, community are aware that learning materials should reflect a diverse, Canadian perspective.	- Develop a process to examine bias when purchasing, developing, or reviewing learning materials - Conduct a yearly review of classroom learning materials for bias - Obtain supplementary materials, resources to ensure Equity perspective. Materials should have a Canadian perspective.	S.I.P. – Curriculum - Instructional Leadership	Handbook re: <i>Bias</i> <i>Aboriginal Resources</i> <i>Challenging Class Bias Grade 7 to 12 TDSB</i>
Critical thinking and critical literacy skills are valued and developed in all subject areas.	- PLC teams develop age and grade level appropriate goals regarding the use of critical thinking to promote Equity perspective	S.I.P. – Curriculum Character Builds Initiative	Teaching Tolerance.org
Students and parents/guardians believe that the learning needs of all students are considered and addressed appropriately.	- Establish a process to develop an individual learning profile that takes into consideration dimensions of equity using current Board tools	S.I.P. - Curriculum Differentiated Instruction <i>Education for All</i>	<i>African Asian Curriculum Resources TDSB</i> <i>Education for All</i>
Religious and faith practices are recognized and accommodated. Curricular and cocurricular materials validate, respect and include a diversity of perspectives and experiences. Field trips and extracurricular activities are sensitive to the social, cultural, and economic needs of the students.	- Refer to <i>HWDSB Interim Religious Accommodation Guideline</i> - Use the <i>TDSB Guidelines and Procedures for the Accommodation of Religious Requirements, Practices and Observances</i> - Keep updated and current multicultural calendars available and information about significant dates - Incorporate discussions relevant to making accommodations as part of staff meeting agendas - Ensure that accommodations are available for students who may be fasting or who may require it - Provide appropriate, culturally sensitive food-choices for students - Provide supports for students who may have financial or other barriers in participating in field trips or other school sponsored events		<i>HWDSB Interim Religious Accommodation Guideline</i> <i>TDSB Guidelines and Procedures for the Accommodation of Religious Requirements, Practices and Observances</i>

Student Languages

Guiding Principle

5.0 The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board will affirm and value students' first languages, while providing their students with the opportunity to acquire competence in Canada's official languages.

Theory and Context

Language is a critical part of identity that connects individuals to their personal, social and cultural lineage and supports positive feelings of self worth. Students who are unable to communicate effectively in Standard English, and who have no opportunity at school to communicate with their peers in their home language, face a peculiar form of social and emotional isolation. It is important to create an environment for learning that liberates a student from linguistic isolation, enables the student to learn how to express themselves effectively and be creative in a safe and supportive milieu. Students may have had varying educational experiences prior to their arrival in Canada, and consequently will require different levels of support in order to succeed in the classroom.

Support is essential for the success of English Language Learners (ELL). Schools have a climate of success for all students that views schools as cultural organizations designed to assure learning rather than institutions designed for instruction. Organizations which are "learning" focused pay great attention to the needs of the learner while organizations that are "instruction" focused pay more attention to the instructor. In a learning focused environment, monitoring student success may require the use of alternate strategies for English Language Learners, especially those who find it difficult to demonstrate their prior learning and knowledge adequately in Standard English.

Reflection Questions

1. How does the school demonstrate that it respects and values all cultures and languages, including Aboriginal languages?
2. How does the school validate and encourage the use of home languages?
3. How does the school assess the prior learning that a student may have when English is not the first language of the student and the student may not have English language competencies?
4. How does the school support English Language Learners in the acquisition of English?
5. What are the program adaptations that are in place for English Language Learners in the regular classroom setting?
6. How does the school access or gain knowledge about the prior knowledge or experiences of English Language Learners?
7. How can a student's prior knowledge be used to build or develop future learning strategies?
8. Does the school use inclusive, easily understood language in all written communication?

Student Languages

Organizer

EXPECTED OUTCOMES	USEFUL STRATEGIES	SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND OTHER INITIATIVES	RESOURCES
Students and the community feel that their cultures and language are validated and the school has an inclusive environment.	- Create visual displays that accurately depict language and culture - Provide school and communication materials to families in home languages - Provide opportunities for students' stories to be heard in a variety of different forms - Embed opportunities to use student first languages in school activities	S.I.P. – Community, Culture and Caring S.I.P. – Curriculum Differentiated Instruction <i>Character Builds:</i> - Respect - Caring - Acceptance - Empathy Bullying Awareness and Prevention	<i>HWDSB English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development: A Resource Manual for Elementary Schools</i> www.settlement.org Cultural Translator Services Dual language books
Students learn Standard English and use dialect and formal/informal language when appropriate.	- Model formal English in the classroom in a non-judgmental way - Provide interventions in a positive and caring manner to students who use non-standard English		
ELL students, through ESL/ELD programming have the opportunity provided to achieve their full potential.	- Provide on-going assessment to determine learning programming needs - Modify and make changes to teaching practice/changes to address curriculum expectations		<i>HWDSB English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development: A Resource Manual for Elementary Schools</i> <i>Many Roots Many Voices</i>
The prior learning of English Language Learners can be demonstrated in a variety of different ways.	- Allow students to work in, or use their first language to show their prior learning and work with a translator and/or community person to provide translation - Use students' prior knowledge to support new learning - Use alternative assessment tools like pictures, drama or other tools		Dual language books
Plain Language Communication.	- Review home-school communications - Provide jargon free communication in English and translated into the major language groups within the school community		

Using an Equity Lens



Assessment

Guiding Principles

6.0 The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board will strive to provide appropriate and bias-free assessment, evaluation, reporting, placement, and programming to equitably meet the educational needs and to maximize the learning potential of all students.

Theory and Context

Students need to feel comfortable in their learning environment, and be aware of what they are expected to achieve and how that achievement will be assessed, measured, and evaluated in a culturally sensitive and inclusive manner. The ability to assess gaps and deficiencies in learning, and/or ability to learn, may be an essential requirement in monitoring student progress; however referrals for in-depth and formal assessments must acknowledge and respect the diversities of students and their families.

Students and their parents and guardians need to know and understand the purpose for which an assessment is being made and what use will be made of the outcomes of the assessment. Because assessment processes and referrals can be intimidating and uncomfortable for individuals unfamiliar with the system, it is important that communication between all parties is clear, unambiguous and culturally appropriate.

Reflection Questions

1. How does the school demonstrate that it has the same high expectation of success for all students?
2. How does the school evaluate and eliminate bias from school based assessments and measuring instruments?
3. Does the school have a fair and transparent process for identifying students in need of informal/formal educational assessments?
4. Does the school provide the full range of accommodations and modifications to meet the learning needs of all students?
5. How does evaluation or assessment of students recognize previous and personal experiences?
6. How does the school use assessment data to meet the learning needs of all students?
7. How does the school communicate programming, placement process and decisions?
8. Is school communication clear, transparent, culturally sensitive and easily understood by parents/guardians and community?
9. How does the school identify and eliminate barriers to open communication and dialogue with parents/guardians?
10. How does the school incorporate cultural perspectives at in-school/system meetings?

Assessment

Organizer

EXPECTED OUTCOMES	USEFUL STRATEGIES	SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND OTHER INITIATIVES	RESOURCES
Students feel that they are successful as they progress through the learning environment of HWDSB.	- Help students understand expectations, assessment processes, and their strengths and needs - Provide students with tools to develop appropriate ways to maximize strengths and address their learning needs - Encourage students to set goals and accept responsibility for their learning - Enable students to become advocates for their own learning - Encourage students to accept responsibility for their learning - Assist students in developing effective student – teacher partnerships for learning	HWDSB Strategic Directions - Achievement Matters - Engagement Matters - Equity Matters	<i>Assessment Centre Reports</i> <i>HWDSB English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development – A Resource for Elementary Schools</i> <i>HWDSB Interim Religious Accommodation Guideline</i> <i>TDSB Guidelines and Procedures for the Accommodation of Religious Requirements, Practices and Observances</i>
Students feel that their assessments are fair, relevant and connected to their success.	- Allow students to assist in developing tools for assessing their learning - Discuss assessment expectations with students - Ensure that assessment tools are inclusive and appropriate for the learning needs and expected outcomes of the student	<i>Character Builds:</i> - Responsibility - Respect - Trustworthiness	
School has established a trusting and culturally sensitive communication process involving students, teachers, parents/guardians and community.	- Develop an ongoing and sustainable relationship with key leaders who are respected and influential within their community - Establish clear and easily understood processes and reporting tools for explaining assessment and placement decisions to students, parents/guardians and community		
School has established a fair and transparent and culturally sensitive process for identifying learning needs of all students.	- Develop a well understood protocol for communications and ensure that messages are clear and consistent - Recognize learning needs and provide a range of accommodations - Provide alternatives to assess prior learning, knowledge and experience		

Using an Equity Lens



Support Services

Guiding Principle

7.0 The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board will provide counselling/guidance/support services that reflect Equity principles.

Theory and Context

Support services become increasingly essential within the school environment as the complexity and diversity of a school increases. These supports are of particular significance for students who may have suffered trauma or who may be new to the school or to the system. To be effective, support services should be sensitive to the diverse needs and rooted in an accurate bias-free profile of the student. Support staff should not only understand the factors which operate, or have operated, in the life of the student but should interact with, counsel and support the student in a culturally appropriate and sensitive way.

Effective support services are not limited to specialists and those with a designated role in the school; it is a function of all teachers and service providers who interact with students. It is important therefore, for all who work with students to reflect on the following questions.

Reflection Questions

1. How does the school develop accurate, bias-free individual student profiles?
2. How does the school know if student profiles are inclusive of the full range of academic, cultural, linguistic, social and learning needs?
3. How does the school assess student need and deliver support services that address the various dimensions of Equity?
4. How does the school provide counselling and career education services that are free from discriminatory biases and reflective of Equity principles?
5. How does the school involve community and support services in a proactive manner that strengthen the family unit and assist students in reaching their full potential?
6. How does the school support students in identifying non-traditional career options?
7. How does the school provide information to parents and guardians about their child's current progress and educational achievement?
8. How does the school know if parents and guardians understand the information provided to them about the progress and educational achievement of their child?

Support Services

Organizer

EXPECTED OUTCOMES	USEFUL STRATEGIES	SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND OTHER INITIATIVES	RESOURCES
All staff has a comprehensive understanding of learning/cultural needs of students.	- Develop individual student profiles collaboratively (Classroom teachers, Learning Resource Teachers, ESL Teachers, School Administrators, support staff, etc.) - Use a variety of information gathering tools	S.I.P. – Curriculum <i>Character Builds:</i> - Caring, - Respect - Acceptance Differentiated Instruction	Equity Policy <i>FirstClass</i> Conference ESL/ELD Resource Group of Ontario (ERGO)
Counselling and support services are free from discriminatory bias.	- Provide access to individual student profiles to appropriate support staff - Develop ongoing support services and communication between schools and support staff	S.I.P. – Curriculum	<i>TDSB Gender Equity Resource Guide</i> <i>HWDSB: Working Together - A Guide to Special Education and Student Services</i>
Relationship of trust is established in which all parties benefit from interactions. Parents/guardians and students become aware of the range of career options in traditional and nontraditional areas. Parents/guardians are kept current and up-to-date about their child's achievement and progress and plans for the future.	- Collect information of relevant agencies and support services available - Establish a process regarding ongoing dialogue and communication - Invite parents/guardians and students to planned, in-school activities such as career fairs - Use a range of communication tools including plain language text and translators to enhance communication with parents/guardians - Provide options for parents/guardians to meet with school personnel outside of regularly scheduled parent/teacher conferences		

Using an Equity Lens



Harassment and Bullying Prevention

Guiding Principles

8.0 The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board will ensure that harassment towards members of the diverse communities by trustees, employees, parents, volunteers, students and the community at large will not be tolerated.

Theory and Context

Within the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, policies and procedures exist that address all forms of harassment that may occur at the staff level and between members of the employee groups. In this guide, the focus for harassment is based on race, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities or on any other prohibited grounds that may occur between students within the classroom or school environment.

These Guiding Principles are rooted in the law. They are contained within the Ontario Human Rights Code, and are consistent with the Equality Rights contained within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; and the revised *Ontario Safe Schools Act* and policies of the Ontario Ministry of Education. These principles are also supported by character education and a plethora of research studies that report on the negative effects, on students and on student learning, that occurs when students are in an environment where they feel harassed and excluded.

The Ontario Human Rights Code defines harassment as “a course of vexatious comment or conduct that is known, or ought reasonably to be known, to be unwelcome”. In a school context, this is commonly called bullying. Because teachers and schools occupy a unique position of responsibility for the physical, academic and emotional environment of its students, they are responsible for monitoring the environment, becoming aware and addressing incidents of harassment that occur within that environment. To ensure that our schools are safe and secure places free from any forms of harassment, teachers and schools must recognize and respond appropriately to harassment when it occurs. In monitoring, recognizing and responding to events and incidents that occur within the school environment we should therefore ask ourselves the following questions:

Reflection Questions

1. What is understood about the process for addressing inter-student harassment/bullying in the school?
2. What is the climate within which inter-student harassment/bullying is reported? What are the barriers that prevent students, parents/guardians, or colleagues from reporting inter-student harassment/bullying?
3. How are staff equipped to recognize, respond appropriately, report and resolve inter-student harassment/bullying?
4. What additional resources or professional development does staff need in order to recognize, respond appropriately, report and resolve inter-student harassment/bullying concerns?
5. How does staff incorporate a “harassment/bullying zone” ethic into the daily activities in the school?
6. How does the school ensure that Safe Schools policies and processes are communicated clearly?
7. How does staff ensure that processes are consistent, fair, equitable, culturally appropriate and free from bias?
8. How does the school deliver anti-bullying education programming?

Harassment and Bullying Prevention

Organizer

EXPECTED OUTCOMES	USEFUL STRATEGIES	SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND OTHER INITIATIVES	RESOURCES
Students understand the process for reporting harassment/ bullying. Students feel that harassment/ bullying complaints are resolved quickly and fairly. Parents/guardians and community members understand the process for reporting harassment to the school. Parents/guardians and community members feel that complaints made by students about harassment are resolved quickly and fairly.	- Develop a Code of Conduct that includes harassment/ bullying - Articulate clearly the responses to harassment/ bullying in the Code of Conduct - Ensure that the Code of Conduct is translated into different languages and displayed prominently in the school and is visible to parents/ guardians, staff, and students - Provide information to, and communication with parents/ guardians with respect to harassment/ bullying issues, in a timely manner - Work with School Councils to provide school community education with respect to harassment/ bullying concerns - Develop an anti-bullying committee that includes parents/ guardians, students and staff	HWDSB Vision/Mission/Values S.I.P. – Environment Curriculum Bullying Awareness and Prevention <i>Character Builds:</i> - Responsibility - Citizenship -- Respect Ontario College of Teachers ‘Standards of Practice’	<i>HWDSB Safe Schools Pillar Policy</i> <i>Ontario Human Rights Commission</i> <i>HWDSB Equity Policy</i>
Bullying and other incidents of harassment in the school show a progressive decline and the school becomes a “harassment/ bullying free zone” community.	- Establish a clear and consistent process for tracking harassment/ bullying - Provide appropriate Professional Development - Provide information, education and training to students, parents/ guardians and community - Develop anti-bullying program initiatives - Host in-school events that include students and community and guest speakers and workshops		

Using an Equity Lens



Resources

Note

The complete Equity Policy and Equity Policy – Supporting Guidelines are available on line on the HWDSB Web site, and are also available through the Equity Department. The policy addresses Equity issues as they relate to:

- Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity
- Gender Equity
- Anti-classism and Socio-economic Equity
- Persons with Disabilities
- Sexual Orientation
- Religious Accommodation

This *Guide to Creating Equitable and Inclusive School Environments* provides an *Equity Lens* that focuses on the diversity needs of students and families within schools and school communities. It provides reflective questions that allow those using the Guide to reflect on their school and their school environment.

The reflective questions and guideline organizer provide tools for conducting a system/school environmental scan that allows board/school personnel to move towards the creation of inclusive schools. Users of this guide should not feel in any way limited in their analysis, but instead create as many additional questions that allow them to obtain a true picture of their school, their school community and school environment.

Sources

- A. Toronto District School Board – Equitable Schools: It's in our hands.
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- D. Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board Equity Policy, Equity Policy Supporting Guidelines and Interim Religious Accommodation Guideline. Revised June 2008.
- E. Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board ESL/ELD: A Resource Guide for Elementary Schools.
- F. Ministry of Education Many Roots, Many Voices.
- G. Effective Schools Research:
 - http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/schools/councils/pdfs/annual_operating_plan_0607.pdf
- H. *Character Builds*
 - <http://www.hwdsb.on.ca/programs/characterbuildshamilton>
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