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# Moving Forward: Building an Inclusive Workforce Action Plan

March 2014

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## 1. Message from Director

The commitment of the Waterloo Region District School Board to the creation of a welcoming, safe and caring working environment is to be commended. The priority placed upon diversity, inclusion and equity in our board's **Moving Forward: Building an Inclusive Workforce** document reflects our core values and our understanding that diversity makes a positive contribution towards student success.

This Action Plan builds on the good work already undertaken by staff and confirms our commitment to hiring processes that are reflective of best practice and consistent with our guiding principles. The actions, measures and timelines contained in this document provide specific strategies and tools for moving forward and ensuring that we are accountable for our progress.

The expectation is that all leaders in our system will familiarize themselves with the Action Plan and will follow through in ensuring a successful implementation of the plan. Your leadership and commitment to this expression of our board's strategic plan is vital to our collective success in operationalizing our stated priorities. More importantly, it will help to ensure that our students are able to learn in an environment that truly values equity and inclusion.



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## 2. Why Commit? The Case for Committing to Our Strategy

Waterloo Region District School Board believes that committing to the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity makes us stronger.

From the perspective of Human Resource Services, a commitment to these core values ought to be reflected in fair, inclusive and equitable hiring practices (job posting, recruiting, job success criteria, pre-screening, interview and selection process, accommodation, post-selection follow-up). Indeed, hiring practices are foundational to building and maintaining a diverse workforce and an inclusive organizational culture.

Our commitment to creating fair, inclusive and equitable hiring practices stems from more than a sense that this is the “right thing to do”. It is rooted in a firm belief that such practices strengthen our organization – they make us better. In short, we believe that a case can be made that such practices “add value” and are key enablers that must be leveraged if we are to achieve our strategic objectives. Our pursuit is motivated by much more than a desire for legal compliance, it is motivated by core values and a sense that this is what will best promote our stated mission: to challenge and inspire learners to be engaged, connected and contributing global citizens.

Our learners, and the families that support our learners, are diverse. The ways in which they are diverse are many – culture, age, gender identity and expression, race, sexual orientation, ability, religious beliefs, educational backgrounds, marital status, and place of origin to name a few. As we establish strategy in support of our stated mission, as we choose the ways in which we will challenge and inspire our learners, as we engage our community in the learning of our students, it only makes sense that our students are best served by a workforce that reflects their diversity.

Our belief is that our Action Plan will move our organization forward in at least the following ways:

- Diversity provides us with a rich pool of perspectives, experiences and insights that will assist us in better understanding and supporting the learning needs of our students and in supporting creativity and innovation;
- Student and community engagement will improve as we become better able to reach out, strengthen our connections and build bridges with previously disconnected or disenfranchised elements of our community;
- We will provide appropriate modeling of values that we have identified as core and critical for establishing a positive learning environment;
- Workplace morale, retention, productivity and satisfaction will increase;
- The image and reputation of our school board will improve resulting in improved public confidence and trust and a belief that we are an “employer of choice”.

## 3. Our Vision for an Inclusive Workforce and Workplace

An inclusive organization demonstrates a commitment to creating an environment where people with diverse backgrounds, skills and perspectives feel valued and can contribute to the organization’s strategic vision and mission. Inclusive organizations embrace, value and leverage the added value such diversity brings to the workplace and the community. Inclusive organizations provide a place where employees feel welcome and able to do their best work free from the negativity and oppression that comes with discrimination and harassment and in an environment that they feel is accessible. Such organizations have a commitment to acknowledging, understanding, accepting, and valuing differences among people. An inclusive workforce brings to the workplace varied races, cultures, religions, ages, sexes, abilities and sexual/gender identities that are celebrated as a desirable source of strength, creativity, innovation and productivity.

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### 4. Supporting Systemic Changes in Practice

Our Action Plan, as the name suggests, represents a call to action. It is an aspirational plan underpinned by the notion that change is required ... the status quo is no longer acceptable. If there was no belief in a need for change, we would not dedicate resources and time to formulating a plan ... we would simply celebrate our past success and optimistically anticipate more of the same. Change is difficult. The process is made easier when those leading change do so with a deep understanding of how to lead change and with sensitivity to the dynamics and challenges of leading change.

This initiative is led by a steering team that understands that we are on a collective journey and that we are learning alongside of our colleagues. We have taken time to understand change leadership as articulated by John Kotter, an internationally renowned leader in the field of change management. Kotter's model is simplistically represented in the diagram below.

The diagram seems to suggest a linear progression of steps to be completed in sequence. We know, of course, that complex changes such as those envisioned in this plan do not unfold sequentially. As such, the steps must be integrated and attended to at every step of the journey. This framework for thinking about change is foundational to the plan outlined in this document.



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### 5. Action Plan

## Moving Forward in 2014: Supporting our Five Commitments

(✓ = complete)

COMMITMENT #1	
<b>Through collaboration and education, develop greater clarity and focus around barriers and opportunities that currently exist with respect to fair, inclusive and equitable hiring practices. Commit to a journey of continuous improvement toward fair, inclusive and equitable hiring practices.</b>	
✓	Establish a Fair, Inclusive and Equitable Hiring Practices (FIEHP) Steering Team and associated Terms of Reference (Fall 2013).
✓	Meet with appropriate stakeholder groups to receive input and to create awareness. Meetings occurred with Administrative Advisory Council, WREA, SSPA, SSVPA, Trustees, Staff Advisory, Leadership Development Steering Team and the Equity and Inclusion Advisory Group (Fall 2013).
✓	Conduct focus group sessions with major stakeholder groups to increase engagement and ensure that all voices are heard. Collate focus group report for consideration by the steering team (December 2013 and ongoing).
☐	Hear the experiences and perspectives of various stakeholder groups. Collate and report the reflections of various stakeholder groups reflecting their beliefs about and experiences of hiring processes in our school board. (Focus Groups and survey feedback) Phase 1 consultation completed, ongoing commitment to further engagement and feedback.
☐	Conduct an “audit of practice” based upon the <b>HR Manager’s Guide to Diversity and Inclusive Practices</b> (Dr. B. Siu, Carswell, 2011) with respect to our board’s hiring practices to determine and fully understand the extent of barriers and any opportunities for improvement that may exist.
☐	Implement a program for soliciting feedback from those experiencing our hiring processes (both successful and unsuccessful candidates).

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### COMMITMENT #2

**Articulate an Action Plan that will remove barriers, affirm supportive existing practices and integrate new strategies that serve to support fair, inclusive and equitable hiring processes.**

- Prepare and introduce “blueprint document” (**Moving Forward: Building an Inclusive Workforce**) to system leaders (October 22, 2013 System Leaders Meeting).
- 2014 Action Plan created.
- Metrics “Scorecard” created and appears at end of this document.
- Continuous improvement to subsequent Action Plans through “Plan, Act, Assess, Reflect” cycle.
- Continue to find ways to align and integrate this initiative closely to our board’s broader Equity and Inclusion initiative.
- Demonstrate evidence of high-level commitment in this organization to the objectives of this initiative.
- Identify “critical friends”, external objective observers, and partners that can assist us on our journey and provide candid advice and feedback about our progress.

### COMMITMENT #3

**Develop a communication plan to assist staff with understanding the need and rationale for revising and strengthening our hiring processes in order to increase staff confidence in a fair, inclusive and equitable hiring process.**

- Revise the “Careers” tab on the board website and ensure that the “blueprint document” (**Moving Forward: Building an Inclusive Workforce**) is linked at the site and available electronically (December 2013).
- Develop a Communication Plan to support effective communication to the system around our vision and progress (December 2013).
- Publish periodic updates and reports that include perceptual, anecdotal and survey data that provide an indication of attitudes and beliefs about our hiring practices. (Commitment to provide at least 3 updates per year. First newsletter published in December 2013). Action plan released March 2014.
- Distribute periodic reports to the system regarding developments, best practice and progress.

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### COMMITMENT #4

**Develop supportive policies, procedures and guidelines that support fair, inclusive and equitable hiring practices. Ensure that every job posting includes a clear statement of WRDSB beliefs about fair, inclusive and equitable hiring practices and our commitment to providing appropriate accommodation.**

- Conduct a thorough audit of all current related policies and procedures. Review current “Guidelines for Employee Candidate Screening and Interviewing and Selection” document and revise to create a new procedure for review and in anticipation of implementation (Fall 2013 and ongoing).
- Include an equity commitment statement on every job posting (posting developed and ready for implementation January 2014).
- Develop interview questions and “look fors” that can be incorporated into OT interview process (Fall 2013).
- Review, develop and implement policies, procedures, guidelines that ensure steps in all hiring and promotion practices are fair, inclusive and equitable (job posting, recruiting, job success criteria, pre-screening, interview and selection process, accommodation, post-selection follow-up). Ensure consistent awareness, implementation and follow-through with established practices. Continue to review, develop and improve practices and measures.

### COMMITMENT #5

**Develop and provide tools, training and resources to ensure that those responsible for academic hiring have the supports needed to conduct fair, equitable and inclusive selection processes.**

- Develop an awareness and understanding of various training program and support options that may be of assistance in supporting the training and capacity of competent leaders (Fall 2013).
- Deliver “Bias Awareness” training to all system leaders (October 22, 2013).
- Develop “Case Study” training program for delivery to all administrators through Family of School meetings (implemented February 2014).
- Deliver training and support programs to all system leaders through multiple methods and means to establish a “capacity base” across the system.
- Develop awareness training for delivery to aspiring leaders and as part of induction programs for those newly appointed to leadership positions.
- Screen candidates for leadership positions to ensure sensitivity and demonstrated capacity in the area of modeling, leading and committing to equity and inclusion.

*COMMITMENT #5 continued on page 7*



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COMMITMENT #5 continued from page 6

### COMMITMENT #5

- Ensure that all Human Resources staff members are trained and conversant in fair, inclusive and equitable hiring practices.
- Develop internal capacity to deliver effective training and identify “practice champions/mentors” who model a deep commitment and high level of capacity in the area of fair, inclusive and equitable hiring practices.
- Develop a program for monitoring training and support needs, opportunities for improvement, and program effectiveness.

## 6. Scorecard: How are We Doing?

Key PHASE 2 Goals	Progress (28/02/14)
1. Hear the experiences and perspectives of various stakeholder groups. Collate and report the reflections of various stakeholder groups reflecting their beliefs about and experiences of hiring processes in our school board.	 Yellow
2. Review, develop and implement policies, procedures, guidelines that ensure that steps in all hiring and promotion practices are fair, inclusive and equitable (job posting, recruiting, job success criteria, pre-screening, interview and selection process, accommodation, post-selection follow-up).	 Yellow
3. Deliver training and support programs to all system leaders through multiple methods and means to establish a “capacity base” across the system.	 Yellow
4. Develop internal capacity to deliver effective ongoing training and identify “practice champions/mentors” who model a deep commitment and high level of capacity in the area of fair, inclusive and equitable hiring practices.	 Red
5. Demonstrate evidence of high-level commitment in this organization to the objectives of this initiative.	 Yellow

**Red Light**  
Considerable work to do.

**Yellow Light**  
Progressing toward goal.

**Green Light**  
Goal successfully achieved!



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