

**Report to Committee of the Whole
June 11, 2007**



**Waterloo Region
District School Board**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jodi Spall'.

Director of Education

SUBJECT: Equity Audit Report

ORIGINATOR: This report was prepared by Mark Schinkel, Executive Officer, in consultation with Executive Committee and Jodi Spall, Equity Officer.

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the findings and recommendations prepared by Equity Officer Jodi Spall following an extensive consultation process and review of our board's practices in the areas of equity, inclusion and diversity.

BACKGROUND:

The Board trustees approved Policy 1008 - *Equity and Inclusion* on May 29, 2006. This policy was supported through the hiring of an Equity Officer commencing January 15, 2007. The Equity Officer, Jodi Spall, was asked to conduct an "equity audit" and to prepare a report summarizing her findings and recommendations. After conducting research and consulting with individuals and groups internal and external to the school board, a final report was prepared. The document accompanying this report, "Equity, Inclusion and Diversity: Building Bridges and Creating Inviting Schools" is the culmination of this work.

STATUS:

"Equity, Inclusion and Diversity: Building Bridges and Creating Inviting Schools" is a document that provides the Board with a detailed summary of the findings of the equity audit conducted by our board's Equity Officer. These findings are presented according to the three areas of focus that provide the framework for our System Success Plan – Learning, Caring, and Connecting. The document concludes with a series of recommendations for consideration and potential future implementation.

COMMUNICATIONS:

It is anticipated that this document will be accessed throughout the Board and across our region. The report will be accessible through our board's website and in other venues. The hope is that the document will become a useful working document in the hands of those seeking to respond to the identified recommendations.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Many of the recommendations provided can be implemented without cost to the board or through the reallocation of existing resources. Other recommendations could only be implemented at a cost to the board. Forecasting the costs associated with the various recommendations would require specific information regarding the plan for implementation.

SYSTEM SUCCESS PLAN:

This report relates to the areas of learning, caring and connecting. The issues of equity, inclusion and diversity impact all aspects of life in our school community.

RECOMMENDATION:

No recommendation. For information only.

Equity, Inclusion & Diversity:
Building Bridges & Creating Inviting Schools

Waterloo Region District School Board

Equity Audit Report
May 2007

Prepared by:
Jodi Spall, Equity Officer



Waterloo Region
District School Board

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Thank you to the individuals and groups who shared their perspectives on equity, inclusion, and diversity at the Waterloo Region District School Board. Their perspectives and stories helped to shape the content of this report and the recommendations for consideration.

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E.S.S./O.S.S.T.F.
P.S.S.P.

Consultation Participants

All the visible and invisible minorities (system leaders, educators, support staff, custodial and plant maintenance staff, students, parents, multi-faith groups, and community partners) who feel their voices are silent, but through their courage and candour, shared their perspectives, allowing their voices to be heard. Also, all the mainstream system leaders, educators, human resources staff, support staff, and custodial and plant maintenance staff, who shared their perspectives. To respect the wishes of those consulted the participants will remain anonymous.

Community and Multi-faith Groups

Waterloo Region Assembly of Public School Councils
Brooke Young and John Wilson, Coordinators, OK2BME – K-W Counselling
The YMCA Settlement Workers of the Waterloo Region
K-W YMCA Cross-Cultural & Community Services
Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre
The Muslim Social Services
The African-Caribbean Parent Network
Cross Cultures Magazine
Kitchener-Waterloo Holocaust Education Committee

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Waterloo Region District School Board trustees approved an *Equity and Inclusion Policy* (P1008) on May 29, 2006. Subsequently, a need was identified to conduct an equity audit to identify best practice and determine any potential gaps around equity and inclusion at the school board.

Beginning January 15, 2007, an Equity Officer was appointed to conduct this audit, which involved a collaborative research process, including research (e.g., Ministry of Education resource documents and social justice research) and consultation with individuals and groups internal and external to the school board system. This process resulted in findings, which are outlined in the report under three key areas of focus: *learning, caring, and connecting*. The specific details for review were as follows:

| Principal Focus Areas | Details for Review |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1. Learning | - Student Curriculum - Staff Development |
| 2. Caring | - Character Development Education - Policies & Procedures - Communication |
| 3. Connecting | - Employment Practices - Projects & Partnerships with the Community |

While the report's findings demonstrate many excellent examples of the Waterloo Region DSB's capacity for equity and inclusion, they also indicate many challenges ahead. The report concludes with a series of recommendations to address some of these challenges, which are centered on the three key areas of focus as they relate to ethnoculturalism and GLBT-Q (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender or Questioning). The recommendations link to existing resources and tools in the Waterloo Region DSB combined with leveraging community partners.

One of the key recommendations is the creation of an **Equity & Inclusion Advisory Group (EIAG)** that would be responsible for the following four mandates:

1. To provide feedback to the Waterloo Region DSB on issues related to equity, inclusion and diversity.
2. To participate with the Waterloo Region DSB in developing a more inclusive and representative curriculum and program reflective of all backgrounds.
3. To determine strategies to engage parents and students from marginalized groups.
4. To carefully consider the recommendations of this report and determine priorities and strategies for implementation.

It is recommended that the EIAG should not have more than 15 representatives, but ideally have representation from the following: trustee, superintendent (Program or HR), elementary and secondary school principal, WRAPSC representative, English language learner (ELL) representative, student trustee, federation(s), multi-faith group representation, multi-cultural group representation, GLBT-Q representation, and community group representation.

This report, **Equity, Inclusion and Diversity: Building Bridges & Creating Inviting Schools** is respectfully submitted to the Waterloo Region DSB trustees for review and further consideration.

1.0 PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

The Waterloo Region District School Board formally implemented a *System Success Plan* in 2005, which was organized around three areas of focus: *Learning, Caring, and Connecting*. In this plan, there were many references to equity, inclusion, and diversity from the perspective of the learning environment, student achievement, communication, health and wellness of staff and students, supportive school cultures, and partnership with the community.

As part of implementing the **caring** goals from the strategic plan, the Waterloo Region DSB trustees approved an *Equity and Inclusion Policy* (P1008) effective May 29, 2006. With the policy approval, combined with the further implementation of the strategic plan **caring** goals, there was an identified need to conduct an equity audit to determine any potential gaps around equity and inclusion at the school board.

It is important to note that a similar audit had not been conducted at the Waterloo Region DSB for a number of years. The last audit was prompted by the Ministry of Education requirement in July 1993 as outlined in Policy 119 – *Development and Implementation of School Board Policies on Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity*. This policy required all school boards to develop and implement an equity plan by September 1, 1995.

Beginning January 15, 2007, an Equity Officer was appointed to conduct this audit. The mandate of the audit was to conduct research, consult with individuals and groups internal and external to the school board system, and provide a final report with recommendations. These recommendations were to include building capacity within the existing system to address the issues of equity and inclusion.

The key areas of focus for the audit followed the three principal areas from the *System Success Plan* as follows:

| Principal Focus Areas | Details for Review |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1. Learning | - Student Curriculum - Staff Development |
| 2. Caring | - Character Development Education - Policies & Procedures - Communication |
| 3. Connecting | - Employment Practices - Projects & Partnerships with the Community |

Combined with reviewing Ministry of Education resources and social justice research, extensive interviews and focus groups were conducted to obtain feedback on equity and inclusion at the Waterloo Region DSB. It is estimated that approximately 300 people were consulted with representation from across the system including trustees, superintendents, administrators, educators, human resources staff, educational assistants, support staff, custodial and plant maintenance staff, the federations and associations, students, parents, multi-faith groups and community partners. These interviews also included perspectives from individuals and/or groups who are identified as dominant mainstream, or as a visible or invisible minority.

The interviews and focus groups were structured in the same manner. The purpose of the audit was described, including the key areas of focus. The definition of equity and inclusion was provided and then three to four questions were used, depending on who was being interviewed, to further guide the discussion. The guiding questions were as follows:

1. What are the key equity and inclusion challenges the Waterloo Region DSB is facing from your perspective?
2. What are some of the challenges (if any) you have personally experienced in our system as a visible minority or invisible minority?
 - a) What has the Waterloo Region DSB/your school done well to support you?
 - b) What could the Waterloo Region DSB/your school do differently?

OR

2. What are some of the challenges (if any) you have seen our visible and invisible minority staff and students face in our system?
 - a) What has the Waterloo Region DSB/the school done well to support these students?
 - b) What could the Waterloo Region DSB/the school do differently?
3. What type of equity and inclusion books, resources, tools and/or professional development would be helpful to support you in your role?
4. Any other information you feel would be helpful for me to understand in my role?

The results of these consultations combined with the research findings are the foundation for this report. It is important to note that it was the Equity Officer's best intent to consult as many individuals and/or groups as possible to obtain a variety of perspectives within the established timeframe. The possibility may exist that some groups, who felt they should have been consulted as part of this process, were inadvertently missed. Any omission of groups, as part of the consultation process, was not intentional on the part of the Equity Officer.

2.0 WHAT ARE EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND DIVERSITY?

The *Ontario Human Rights Code, 2000* provides legislative affirmation that everyone has the right to be free from harassment and discrimination on the basis of one's race, sex, colour, ancestry, place of origin, ethnic origin, marital status, same sex partner status, sexual orientation, age, disability, citizenship, family status or religion. The Code clearly stipulates everyone is responsible for human rights.

The Waterloo Region DSB, in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Education Act, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms developed the *Equity and Inclusion Policy* (P1008), which outlines that every student, staff, parent, community member, and trustee has the right to be free from discrimination and harassment because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, family status or ability (see [Appendix A](#) for the complete policy).

So, how does the Ontario Human Rights Code and Waterloo Region DSB policy around equity and inclusion get translated into daily life at the education centre, in the classroom, and in the school community?

How does the Waterloo Region DSB ensure a consistent understanding at all system levels around equity, inclusion and diversity?

This is a complex task, as everyone defines it differently. Also, individuals from the mainstream dominant groups (predominantly identified as white, heterosexual, and eurocentric) do not always understand the need to address equity and inclusion; instead, some of these individuals view issues around equity and inclusion as visible and invisible minorities pushing "personal agendas". Simply put, we all view equity, inclusion, and diversity, regardless of our background, through our own personal lens based on personal experiences, developed biases, and labels.

Therefore, for the purpose of this report, *equity, inclusion and diversity* is defined as:

...allowing for individual differences while working toward a common social justice for all....[it] means attempting to incorporate the entire spectrum of differences, looking at people as whole, multidimensional human beings, and not presuming to know how people identify themselves, or assuming comprehension of their particular experiences without asking them about it. It is work toward social justice. It is respect for others, but not at the expense of justice" (Khayatt, 1998, p. 12).

This definition is further reinforced in numerous Ministry of Education resource documents which explicitly outline that diversity takes many different forms in all our Ontario communities including but not limited to cultural diversity, gender, intellectual and physical abilities, religious and social backgrounds, and sexual orientation (Ministry of Education, 2006). These documents further outline the importance of incorporating a variety of cultural experiences and multiple perspectives into the classroom and school environment as a whole to ensure everyone feels valued; in turn contributing to a successful school environment (Ministry of Education, 2006).

3.0 WATERLOO REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD DEMOGRAPHICS

3.1 Schools

The Waterloo Region DSB serves over 56,000 students of which over 36,000 are elementary and over 20,000 are secondary. There are also 4,160 identified English Language Learners (ELL) enrolled at the Waterloo Region DSB. Across the 114 schools, some schools are perceived to be homogeneous, while others are very multi-cultural. There is no student self-identification process to determine what visible and/or invisible minority groups are represented in each school. However, there is some statistical data available as follows:

The *Waterloo Region DSB Elementary School Language and Immigration Statistics 2005-2006* data indicates 18% of elementary students do not have English as their first language (i.e., mother tongue). Over 102 languages are spoken of which the top five are German, Romanian, Arabic, Serbian, and Spanish. There are 143 countries from which elementary students immigrate (the top five are USA, Pakistan, China, India, and Romania). The five elementary schools with the most countries represented are A.R. Kaufman P.S., Queensmount Sr. P.S., Laurentian Sr. P.S., Lester B. Pearson P.S., and a tie for fifth - King Edward P.S., Laurelwood P.S., and Sunnyside Sr. P.S. There is no comparable data for the 2006-2007 school year or for secondary schools.

In comparison, the *Settlement and Education Partnership Waterloo Region (SEPWR) Report April 1, 2006 – March 31, 2007* outlines of the 5,469 clients serviced, 2,736 were parents, 1,828 were secondary school students, 504 were children, and 401 community members. Of those clients serviced, the top countries of immigration were Afghanistan, China and Sudan. The top three languages spoken of these clients were Arabic, Mandarin and Dari.

3.2 Staff

The Waterloo Region DSB has approximately 6,300 staff of which approximately 3,400 are educators and approximately 200 are administrators. There are no staff representation metrics based on being an identified aboriginal person, a person with a disability, and/or a person who is a visible minority. However, consistently throughout the audit consultations, unprompted feedback identified four visible minority administrators – one at the secondary level and three at the elementary level. Further analysis confirmed these metrics.

3.3 Immigration

According to the *2001 Census and Statistics Canada*, one in five residents in Waterloo Region is an immigrant, accounting for 21.4% of the Region's total population. Waterloo Region has the fifth highest per capita immigrant population in Canada behind Toronto, Vancouver, and Hamilton. It is predicted that by the year 2031, the proportion of immigrants in Waterloo Region will be between 26.6% and 32.2% of the total population (Maan & Vandebelt, 2006).

These immigration statistics do not capture the percentage of individuals who have voluntarily immigrated to Canada versus those individuals who are refugees to Canada. Both groups confront different, but at times, similar challenges when acculturating to Canada. Refugees are overcoming the challenges experienced in war-torn countries. Both refugees and immigrants are confronting issues of acculturation to a new country, poverty, unemployment or underemployment. The statistics also do not capture the number of immigrants who settle in Waterloo Region as their second and final stage of immigration (i.e., first land in Toronto, then permanently settle in Waterloo Region).

The *2001 Census and Statistics Canada* report also indicates that approximately 24% of Ontarians have a first language other than English (as cited in Ministry of Education, 2006). Also, Waterloo

Region has a slightly higher percentage of people without high school diplomas (29.5%) and 44% of adults who are functioning at above a literacy level of 3, which is considered to be the minimum literacy skill required for successful participation in society (Hoy & Ikavalko, 2005).

3.4 Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender or Questioning (GLBT-Q)

The GLBT-Q community is the most invisible minority and as a result, there are no concrete statistics available to reflect the percentage of individuals who identify as GLBT-Q in Waterloo Region. However, it is estimated that 8-10% of the general population is GLBT-Q based on information provided by The American Psychological Association on Sexual Orientation, July 1994 (as cited in KW Counselling & F&CS Outreach Proposal, 2005). Applying this estimate to the *2001 Census and Statistics Canada* data, it is estimated there are approximately 6,549-8,183 children and youth between the ages of 5-17 in the Region of Waterloo who are GLBT-Q (KW Counselling & F&CS Outreach Proposal, 2005). Again using the *2001 Census Data*, it is estimated there are approximately 31,670 GLBT-Q adults 20 years of age and older. GLBT-Q has no boundaries, which means visible minorities can also identify as GLBT-Q.

3.5 Aboriginal Community

According to the *2001 Census and Statistics Canada* data, there are approximately 3,235 aboriginal peoples living in the Kitchener Census Metropolitan Area (as cited in Ministry of Education Aboriginal Policy Framework, 2007).

3.6 Other Visible and Invisible Minorities

There are other identified visible and invisible minorities, including for example persons with a mental or physical disability and various religious groups. However, without a self-identification process, it is difficult to capture the specific metrics for each group in the Waterloo Region.

4.0 SUMMARY OF EQUITY AUDIT FINDINGS

The key areas of focus for the audit were structured around the three principals of the System Success Plan – learning, caring, and connecting. The summary of the results are outlined as follows:

4.1 Learning

A. The Research

1. Ministry of Education

Ministry of Education resource documents explicitly outline the need to address diversity and equity in the classroom. Of the nine strategies for the *Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat*, strategy 6 reads, “mobilize the system to provide equity in student outcome” (Literacy & Numeracy Secretariat Strategy Document, August 2005). To support this strategy the Secretariat has three goals, which focus on bringing awareness among educators about the groups who underachieve, ensuring that school boards develop strategic plans to bring about equity of outcome for these designated groups, and finally implementing professional development for educators to support the improvement of these groups. To initiate this strategy, a Webcast on Equity of Outcome for All was produced by the Secretariat and broadcast on March 8, 2007.

Also, Ministry of Education curriculum resource documents, particularly those focused on literacy instruction, include a section centered on diversity and equity in the classroom. These resources outline the need to have a variety of cultural experiences and perspectives in the classroom to ensure all children feel valued. Some specific references from The Ministry document A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction – Grades 4 to 6, 2006 (p.1-5) include:

- The performance of all students is strengthened when the diversity of the class is recognized and valued.
- Pictures and examples should illustrate the accomplishments of all members of society, so that children will see themselves in the curriculum.
- When students are comfortable and feel secure in their learning environment, their true potential will be reflected in their performance. Recognizing and valuing diversity strengthens students’ capacity to work both independently and within a collaborative setting.
- Learning occurs when children are exposed to the unfamiliar. Discussing viewpoints and sharing aspects of different cultures, customs, and languages are powerful tools for learning.
- Being committed to inclusion means empowering students to use their voices and experiences in building their knowledge and understanding. The diversity of students’ voices must be reflected in the learning materials, discussions, problem solving, and learning applications. Teachers who recognize and build on the diversity of their students adopt flexible approaches, maintain high standards, and bring concepts alive by presenting them in contexts that students perceive to be real and meaningful.
- Children will experience diversity throughout their lives. Their capacity to develop awareness and empathy early on will influence their future actions considerably.

- Diversity lenses – when as much of society as possible is represented in that vision, teachers succeed in dismantling feelings of alienation and exclusion and instead build feelings of respect and acceptance.

This Ministry document further outlines a Checklist Tool to use in one’s classroom to assess the inclusivity of the classroom community.

2. The English Language Learner

Other Ministry documents focused on the *English Language Learner* (ELL) explain that languages other than English and French need to play a role in schooling. Specifically, Ontario’s linguistic heritage also includes several Aboriginal languages, many African, Asian, and European languages, and some varieties of English such as Jamaican Creole (Coelho, 2006).

Research also indicates that maintaining one’s first language benefits the learning of a second language. Therefore, ELL students are now being encouraged to maintain and continue to develop their own language, while they learn English (Coelho, 2006). Translated into the school community, the Ministry encourages the use of dual-language books as well as including multi-cultural and multi-lingual books in the library to ensure all cultures and languages are reflected in the school community.

3. The Aboriginal Learner

The Ministry of Education has also developed an Ontario, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework, 2007, which clearly outlines expectations for each school board to develop strategic plans to improve the achievement of these students.

4. The Black Learner

Another group that continues to be the focus of Ministry research is the *Black Learner*. Preliminary research indicates the school curriculum needs to better reflect the positive contributions of the black community instead of portraying their cultures and languages as inferior to the dominant groups. This will allow the *Black Learner* to feel more included (Williams-Taylor, 2006).

5. The Economically Disadvantaged Learner

The Ministry also held a panel to discuss how poverty affects the achievement gap. This panel clarified the fundamental difference between being *poor* and living in *poverty* - “poverty is a culture – a set of values and beliefs taken on by a group. It can control one’s thinking and expectations” (as cited in Bennis, 2006, www.inspirelearning.ca). To assist students to move out of poverty, educators, families, and society need to empower students with the belief this is possible. This empowerment can be done, for example through literature that does not reflect poor people as being pathetic and consciously engaging students. Teachers may avoid addressing students who are poor or combating negative language around poverty because it may be perceived as too overwhelming (Bennis, 2006).

6. Waterloo Region DSB Procedures & Guidelines

Specific to the Waterloo Region DSB, there is A Guideline for Use in Planning for the Recognition of Religious and Cultural Days of Significance in Schools (AP7020) which provides guidelines for educators and administrators around how to observe all religious and cultural days of significance to recognize the diversity of cultures represented in our schools and in our communities. The Waterloo Region District School Board - Selection of Educational Resources, 2005, is another resource document, which supports the use of diverse resources in the classroom to reflect the variety of experiences of our school communities.

In closing, when it comes to learning about equity, inclusion and diversity, as Nelson Mandela said “Education is the most powerful weapon with which you can change the world.”

B. The Consultation Process

The general theme from the Waterloo Region DSB consultation process related to learning was to become more *explicit* and *systemic* about equity, inclusion and diversity in the curriculum, classroom and school community. It was continuously mentioned that equity, inclusion and diversity needed to expand beyond the ELL classroom. Educators readily admitted they do not always have a good understanding about different religious or cultural days of significance and they are not always sure how to learn more without offending the affected community. Consistently it was suggested a resource that outlined the dates of significant celebrations and events including a description of the event/celebration, would be an excellent tool. Also, a list of contacts from the community and multi-faith groups who would be able to speak to these significant events in the classroom and/or at staff meetings would be a beneficial resource.

In contrast, the affected community acknowledges the school board has made progress in understanding different days of significance and they do not expect educators to be experts; however, they want educators to be open to continued learning versus simply instructing from a Christian Eurocentric perspective.

An elementary teacher who is Muslim and wears a hijab at the beginning of each school year explains the meaning of a hijab and allows her students to ask 10 questions. After these 10 questions are asked, discussions about the hijab are closed to reinforce it does not define her as a teacher – Story relayed to Equity Officer

My son wants to change his name to Mikey and identify as a Christian in order to better fit into the school environment. – Muslim Parent

We would appreciate a notice going home to families asking whether their child will be fasting as part of Ramadan. This will help bring awareness to the teacher so alternative arrangements can be made for fasting students to sit out of hectic sports in gym and/or to sit in an alternate location during nutrition breaks to avoid being around other students who are eating. – Muslim Parent

It would be nice if other celebrations were incorporated into the holiday activities in December instead of focusing on the Christian holiday of Christmas. For example, there is a Hanukkah celebration, etc. – Jewish Parent

Consistently staff and the community mentioned the need to have more reflective books, resources and tools that encompass all cultural experiences and student backgrounds in the classroom and school libraries. They also felt it was extremely important to have more representative staff reflecting the existing school community; in turn, this would provide role models for all students. It was often mentioned how few visible minority administrators and teachers exist in our system.

I am tired of seeing posters of black children reflected as poor, starving children in Africa. – African Parent

When children do not see themselves reflected in the curriculum or books in the libraries or classrooms, they do not feel included. They feel that something is wrong with them; they feel inferior.- African-Caribbean Parent

A student from a feeder school came running up to me to ask whether I was the black vice-principal, as they were so excited to know that one existed. I explained I wasn't him, but that he did really exist! – Secondary School Educator

There was hesitation by many educators and administrators about introducing sexual orientation or same-sex books and resources into the classroom or libraries. The main reason cited for the hesitation was parental backlash.

I would love to introduce the book King and King into my medieval times unit, but I am not convinced my administrator will support me for fear of parental backlash and I am not comfortable doing this without her support – ETFO Imagine a World Free from Fear Participant

However, throughout many discussions system leaders and educators indicated the Waterloo Region DSB needs to improve discussions about the “pink elephant” – an analogy used in reference to the absence of speaking about homosexuality in schools. Administrators indicated they wanted tools to assist them in working with same-sex parents and addressing parental backlash. Teachers (in particular, guidance counsellors) wanted tools to support students who are “questioning or coming out”. As a whole, individuals want the information and/or tools to assist them in incorporating sexual orientation discussions into the school environment.

We are doing a huge disservice to our staff and students by not discussing homosexuality in the classroom. This absence of discussion not only impacts the students who are GLBT-Q, but it also impacts the students who have same-sex parents, a gay friend, a gay relative, etc. It creates the perception that being gay is abnormal, so students fear that by sharing or talking about GLBT-Q they will be harassed, teased, and/or bullied. – Elementary Teacher

With respect to ELL, the community identified the need to have a central welcome/reception centre where students could be assessed for the classroom. They felt this would ensure a consistent approach to assessment. Also, ELL consultants, teachers and administrators reinforced the need to have dual-language books both in the ELL classroom and in the school libraries. Excellent examples of where dual-language books are being used are Sunnyside Sr. P.S. and Winston Churchill P.S.

Stephanie Ledger and Kay Cairns introduced the Winston Churchill P.S. Dual Language Book Club. ELL students are partnered up with either a senior ELL student or parent who speaks the same language to create books in both their native language and English. These books are published and read at school. They can be found in the school's library and potentially soon at the Waterloo Public Library.

In summary, equity, inclusion and diversity must become more systemic in the Waterloo Region DSB. In some cases, educators need to change the way they educate in the classroom by shifting their perspective when developing lesson plans to ensure they are teaching all students.

At a recent staff meeting, we were discussing a book about flying a kite. I asked my staff how many had asked their students who had flown a kite before starting the lesson. The response was “none”. I further explained that we can't assume everyone has flown a kite. I suggested the lesson should perhaps start with going out to the field to fly a kite and then reading the book. This will ensure everyone is starting with the same experience of flying a kite. – Elementary Administrator.

4.2 Caring

A. The Research

The equity, inclusion and diversity research related to **caring** is focused in three distinct areas – character development education which addresses the whole student, immigrant youth and parent experiences, and GLBT-Q statistical information. In addition, there was a recent settlement agreement between the Ministry of Education and the Ontario Human Rights Commission, which is relevant to the caring component of equity, inclusion and diversity. This research is outlined below.

1. Character Development Education

Character development education is a new Ministry initiative being driven by fundamental research indicating the emotional quotient (EQ) is more important than the Intelligence Quotient in determining success in school and life (Finding Common Ground, Ministry of Education, 2006). Further “emotional literacy – the ability to identify, manage, and express one’s emotions in a mature and conscientious manner – assists in improving students’ academic achievement scores and school performance” (Finding Common Ground, Ministry of Education, 2006, p.3).

The Ministry document Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, K-12, 2006 contains a wealth of information supporting the importance of character development education. For example, character development education ensures teaching the whole student in the context of our diverse schools and communities. It will better prepare our students to effectively work with people of diverse backgrounds. It will encourage our students to develop civic engagement, which has shown to develop more positive attributes of global citizenship. The 4th Pillar of the Student Success/Learning to 18 Initiative – Community, Culture and Caring also provides an avenue to achieve higher student success. To summarize, character development education is developed through engagement, dialogue, reflection and action – it meets the needs of the whole, multi-dimensional student.

“We must remember that intelligence alone is not enough. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of a true education” – Martin Luther King Jr.

As part of the System Success Plan and Character Development education program for the Waterloo Region DSB, a community forum was held on January 23, 2006 and May 25, 2006 seeking input around the key character attributes and social-emotional skills to assist in students’ success. Key attributes identified relating to equity, inclusion and diversity included: caring, kindness, empathy, tolerance, cooperation and respect.

2. Immigration Experiences of Youth and Parents

Character development education focuses on the whole student; however, there is also specific research related to the care of immigrants, which requires equal focus. In Many Roots and Many Voices, 2005, p.39 the adjustment process for immigration is outlined:

Arrival and first impressions: newcomers are excited to be in a new environment and are optimistic about new opportunities. Refugees are relieved to have arrived in a safe environment.

Culture shock: Newcomers are less optimistic as the challenges of resettlement become more evident. Some become “stuck” at this stage; in turn, special efforts must be made to help students and parents feel part of the school community.

Adjustment Process Cont'd....

Recovery and optimism: This period is characterized by renewed optimism. It is usually prompted by a success at school or someone who is supporting them (e.g., a teacher). Students are becoming more confident about speaking English and about fitting in without having to abandon their cultural identity.

Acculturation: Immigrants become more comfortable with a new identity that balances their original culture with elements of the new culture.

The adjustment process is important for system leaders, educators, support staff, and custodial and plant maintenance staff to understand, as students and/or parents might be at different stages in the process at any one time. For example, one student might be in culture shock while another might be fully acculturated. Where a student is at in the process affects their ability to learn effectively and must be considered when teaching and when working with them in the school environment (e.g., in the classroom, in the halls, in the office, etc.). To ease the adjustment process for immigrants, it is important for students and parents to feel welcome in the school community, which can include having welcome signs in different languages, translators available, etc.

Another research study Pathways to Success: Immigrant Youth at High school –Waterloo Region (October 2006), focused on immigrant youth, indicates that although immigrant youth demonstrate remarkable patience, flexibility, and resiliency, they also experience significant challenges resettling. Some of these challenges include:

- Pressure from parents to succeed, as many parents came to Canada for better opportunities for their children.
- Feeling isolated and alone from the mainstream students who laugh at them when trying to speak English. Some feel mainstream students are incredibly unforgiving of differences and they feel some are not willing to learn about different cultures. Immigrant youth may feel isolated based on their appearance, food they eat, and language barriers. At times they were teased and bullied because of their differences. These youth were also frustrated by administrators and educators who demonstrated an unwillingness to learn how to properly pronounce their names or alternatively individuals who anglicized their name because it was easier.
- Frustrations around educational gaps, particularly for refugees. These youth felt further isolated because they were not able to read and write, putting them further behind.
- Immigrant youth feel divided between the Canadian culture within which they live and the cultural beliefs of their families. These cultures sometimes collide as youth try to fit in. Immigrant youth are also more susceptible to being recruited by gangs, as a sense of belonging.
- The parent-child role reversal is also difficult for immigrant youth who watch their once successful parents struggling with unemployment or underemployment. These youth are relied on as translators for their parents while others are required to work part-time or quit school to work full-time to support their families.

The study concluded by outlining the two foundational factors contributing to the success of immigrant youth in high school – *self motivation and support from someone who believes in them*. Typically, the person identified as believing in them was a teacher and in some cases it

was a teacher combined with the work of a settlement worker. Again this research is important to take into consideration when dealing with immigrant youth in our school communities.

3. GLBT-Q Statistical Data

Research around GLBT-Q also needs to be considered. In particular, some GLBT Canadian statistics are as follows:

- Canada has one of the highest youth suicide rates in the world, and one-third of these are GLBT youth (Kroll & Warneke, 1995)
- 46% of gay and lesbian victims of hate crimes were injured as a result of being homosexual. This rate was almost twice the proportion of injury among hate crime victims in general (Statistics Canada, 2004)

Also, The McCreary Centre Society in British Columbia (1999) found the following in a survey conducted with lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender youth (mean age =17):

- in the past year at school 63% of participants reported being verbally abused, 34% have been threatened with violence, and 17% have been physically assaulted
- in the past year outside of school 56% of youth reported being verbally abused, 28% have been threatened and 90% have been physically assaulted
- 71% of the youth reported that they have seriously considered attempting suicide, while 46% have actually attempted it; 30% have attempted more than once
- 61% of survey participants have been physically abused and 40% have been sexually abused. The majority of these cases of abuse were due to their sexual orientation.

These are alarming statistics and need to be considered in developing plans to support GLBT-Q students and staff in our school system.

4. The Terms of Settlement between OHRC and the Ministry of Education

Recently, the Safe Schools provision under the Education Act was challenged by the Ontario Human Rights Commission for having a disproportionate impact on racial minority students and students with disabilities. The result was a Term of Settlement between the Commission and Ministry that outlines 57 requirements to be followed, which include for example expanding the mitigating factors of the safe school provisions to include whether the suspension/expulsion might be driven by race, disability, ethnicity, place of origin and/or colour. Other requirements include collecting data on the make-up of the student population, school boards developing and implementing strategies that value all diversity in the classroom and curriculum, training of all staff on equity, inclusion, and diversity, ongoing communication with parents, etc. (Terms of Settlement, www.ohrc.on.ca, 2007).

In summary, there is a vast quantity of research on the care required within our school communities when dealing with equity, inclusion, and diversity to ensure the needs of the whole child are addressed.

5. Waterloo Region DSB Equity, Inclusion and Diversity Policies and Procedures

Waterloo Region DSB policies and procedures related to equity and inclusion are also important for staff and students to feel supported and cared for. The communication and visibility of these policies and procedures are imperative so staff and students know what resources are available to them when they have questions and/or concerns requiring resolution. Specific equity and inclusion policies and procedures include the Equity and Inclusion Policy (P1008), the *draft* administrative procedures addressing the types of harassment and how to file a complaint, and the Administrative Procedures for Dealing with Racial, Religious & Ethnocultural Harassment (AP5045). There is also the Annual Accessibility Plan – Waterloo Region District School Board – September 2006 – August 2009, which was developed in

response to the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 200*, and outlines the Waterloo Region DSB's plan to address barriers for people with disabilities.

B. The Consultation Process

It is human nature to often view the world based on personal experience, developed biases, labels and assumptions. However to become more equitable and inclusive, society needs to challenge their own beliefs, assumptions, and labels and try to view things from a different perspective – not an easy task!

All individuals consulted mentioned their own personal challenges in seeing the world through their own lens. They humbly shared their personal experience in trying to broaden their understanding to ensure their approach was more equitable and inclusive. Some of the stories shared were so simple, and yet had incredible impact on the lives of many.

I really try hard to correctly pronounce a child's name that might not be a traditional anglicized name. I will introduce myself to the students and ask them to tell me their name. Often they begin by spelling it to which I immediately stop them. I let them know that I am committed to learning how to pronounce their name with their help. It might take me a few times, but I will get it eventually. I then close our conversation by letting the student know that our school is lucky to have their culture as part of it. I can't tell you how many students have come back to tell me how much it means to them that I correctly pronounce their name. We even laugh about how long at times it took, but how I did it. For me, this shows the students that I too am open to learning. I know how I would feel if someone mispronounced my name – not valued at all- this is why I am committed to pronouncing students' names correctly – Secondary School Administrator.

I really appreciated when my daughter's teacher found her a quiet place to pray and helped her find the right direction to pray. – Muslim Parent

I was so frustrated that one of my refugee students would not sit in class despite everything I was doing to make this happen. Then one day, a mainstream student popped a balloon close to this student who in turn was terrified. Once I comforted this student, I realized this experience most likely reminded him of exploding bombs in his country. It was this experience that made me realize just how much this student had experienced as a refugee and then coming to Canada. I realized I needed to readjust my expectations and understand that it was taking him longer to adjust to Canada. I knew time and my support would make things better. – ELL Teacher

I often reflect on the process I will use to “come out” to my class. It is an important message for me to share with my students because being gay is a part of who I am. This year when I “came out”, I used a Restorative Justice Circle for the follow-up discussion. What the students shared was amazing – one in particular thanked me for sharing and said to the whole class that he has a gay aunt with whom he is quite close. He now felt more comfortable to talk about this with his fellow classmates without fear of being laughed at, teased or bullied. Prior to this discussion, he wouldn't have shared. – Teacher

Another powerful factor in the consultation process was the “welcoming way” different schools welcomed students and parents. **Abraham Erb P.S.** has a beautiful maple leaf tree poster in the front foyer, with flags from all the countries of the school community at the roots, and a maple leaf with every student's name on it in the branches of the tree. **Cedarbrae P.S.** has a welcome sign, office sign, washroom sign, etc. translated into the languages reflected in the school community.

Other schools have flags hanging representing the various countries of their school community. **Empire P.S.**, a more homogeneous school, is looking to bring awareness around multiculturalism by speaking to the student's ancestry and reflecting that in the school. **Laurelwood P.S.** has posters and signs throughout the school reflecting their common operating principles – *I make the difference - respect for myself, respect for others, respect for our school and its environment.*

To provide a positive space for our GLBT-Q students, **Eastwood Collegiate Institute** and **Jacob Hespeler Secondary School** developed a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), which has tremendous support from administration, teachers, and students. Students from the GSA share that, although at times the homophobic language exists in the hallways, some teachers are getting better at addressing it. Also, for some students, school and the GSA was the safest place for them to be themselves.

In contrast, some assumptions, labels and biases are guiding some staff's interaction with students. This can have damaging effects on the student and staff.

My daughter in Senior Public School elected to wear a hijab. She was told her choice became a topic of conversation in the staff room around why she would elect to do this. There was concern she was being pressured by home and concerns about oppression. I wish teachers and administrators would support my daughter's choice versus making a spectacle out of her. – Muslim Parent

When I arrived to ask for math help, the math teacher said to me – “why are you asking for math help?” – Asian Student

One of our top students in the secondary school is suffering from severe mental illness. I had one teacher who came to me and said, “She has everything, and I had no idea this was an issue for her, but I now realize, if it can be her, it can be anyone”. – Child & Youth Worker

I am so frustrated by the unwillingness of administrators, and teachers to address the homophobic language in the hallways. Being a member of the gay community, hearing “You're so Gay”, “You Fag”, etc. has the same impact as calling someone of colour the “n-word”. Students and teachers need to know this unacceptable. – consistently heard by the Equity Officer in discussions with Gay Students, Teachers, and Community Partners

The teacher wanted to call Family & Children Services because she learned from the student that he wasn't sleeping on a bed. When the discussion arose at a parent-teacher interview, through translation, the teacher learned the parent couldn't afford it and didn't know where to go for help, as he didn't qualify for social assistance. With agreement by the parent, the teacher worked with the family to find them a donated mattress. – Settlement Worker

Consistently it was communicated that whether one is a teacher, system leader, custodial staff, support staff, human resource staff, student, parent or community partner, more respectful dialogue needs to occur with each other to develop a better awareness about what is happening in people's lives before reacting. Restorative Justice was continuously suggested as a means to respectfully hold this dialogue and there are a few known local circles related to equity, inclusion and diversity that have been successful.

The GLBT-Q Community is the one evidenced through the consultation process who feels the most isolated and unsafe in our system. This was consistently shared by staff, some students, and same-sex parents. This community is frustrated by a perceived lack of support from the Waterloo Region DSB. Key areas of discussion focused around:

- The fear and frustration about “coming out” over and over again throughout one’s life, particularly without a clear understanding of how the Waterloo Region DSB will support them as their employer if staff or parental backlash is received.
- Being three steps ahead in any conversation to not expose one’s personal life, as they do not feel the staff or their administrator will support them if it was commonly known they were gay. The inability to have pictures up of one’s partner, as this would raise too many objectionable eyes and/or questions.
- From a student perspective, not having any support at home from family because, unlike a “visible” minority parent, no one might be able to directly relate to their experience of being gay. In some cases, the family “kicks the child out” of their house and they are left to support themselves resulting in increased dropout rates.
- The lack of books, resources and tools reflecting the gay community and same-sex parents in our curriculum and school libraries. The frustration around the perceived unwillingness of the Waterloo Region DSB to allow sexual orientation to be openly discussed in the classroom. Interestingly, the **Imagine a World Free from Fear** resource kit has never been signed out from the resource library.
- The frustration around the unwillingness of administrators to not consistently address the homophobic language in the staff rooms and hallways.
- The lack of support they feel from administrators in wanting to come out to their staff and/or their students when doing so in some cases might save a student’s life.
- The inability for same-sex parents to feel comfortable coming to parent-teacher interviews together for fear of backlash from other parents in the school community and the affect it might then have on their child.

The feedback suggests that a clear direction to support the GLBT-Q community at the Waterloo Region DSB is needed.

Finally, in the consultation process, it was consistently reinforced that the Equity and Inclusion Policy needs to be broadly communicated through the system. To supplement the *draft* administrative procedures about harassment and harassment complaints, the Administrative Procedures for Dealing with Racial, Religious & Ethnocultural Harassment (AP5045) needs to be reviewed and potentially updated. Both of these procedures also need to be communicated system-wide to ensure everyone understands the resources available to them in the event of an incident related to equity and inclusion. Too often individuals shared they were not sure who to speak with if they had an issue, particularly if they were not comfortable speaking with their manager or supervisor.

4.3 CONNECTING

A. The Research

Diversity: School, Family, and Community Connections (Winton, 2007) outlines research suggesting that focusing on both school and home environment (e.g., parents) works to improve student achievement more than focusing on either area alone. Research consistently demonstrates that barriers for parental involvement include (Winton, 2007; Ministry of Education – Many Roots, Many Voices, 2005; Ochocka, 2006):

1. Contextual factors – time constraints due to work obligations, childcare needs, transportation problems.
2. Inability to speak English and lack of confidence around speaking English.
3. Lack of understanding about Canadian educational processes – the parent is to be an advocate and participant in their child’s education. In some countries, involvement in their child’s education is forbidden.
4. Discrimination and exclusion from the school and other parents.

To make schools more inviting the research outlines a number of suggestions, including (Winton, 2007; Ministry of Education – Many Roots, Many Voices, 2005; Ochocka, 2006):

1. **Be welcoming** – pronounce names correctly, be friendly to parents, have materials in the curriculum that are reflective of all cultural backgrounds, have translators available, have welcoming signs, notices, and newsletters in different languages.
2. **Hold workshops/meetings** to help families understand how Canadian schools work and what’s expected of both students and families. This could include a number of different sessions – a typical classroom day, parent-teacher interviews, the report card, etc.
3. **Get newcomers involved** – make outreach a priority to ensure all parents have the opportunity to participate in schools in whatever way they feel most comfortable.

B. The Consultation Process

It became evident as part of the consultation process that there is a wealth of resources and partners in Waterloo Region. Some highlighted examples that may be further leveraged include:

I. Ethnocultural Community Partners

a. Settlement and Education Partnership in Waterloo Region (SEPWR)

This program, in partnership with Waterloo Region DSB and Waterloo Catholic District School Board, is designed to introduce and link newcomer students and their families to the education system in Ontario as well as to other institutions and community services.

In Waterloo Region, there are currently six settlement workers and one coordinator who speak many different languages. The Settlement workers provide translation services and help the school staff to better understand the immigrant issues and cultural expectations of the newcomer immigrants.

SEPWR also has a wealth of resources available including the Newcomers Guide for Elementary and Secondary Schools and an Orientation Video for newcomer students called “New Moves”. Workshops are also available for parents to assist in understanding the report cards and parent-teacher interviews. The program has a wealth of expertise and incredible programs/information.

Consistently the Settlement Workers received high praise from all system levels, students and parents.

b. Leadership Training Handbook

A Civic Participation group, in partnership with both the Waterloo Region DSB and Waterloo Catholic DSB recognized the absence of newcomer parents on parent councils. In response, they developed a Leadership Training Handbook and trained about 32 parents over a course of one year. This training involved outlining how the Canadian school system worked, explaining the different roles in the education system, explaining the report card, parent-teacher interviews, how to communicate in Canada, etc. The goal was to increase the confidence level of newcomer parents to participate on parent councils. This training has received an overwhelmingly positive response from participants who indicated it gave them a better understanding and appreciation about the Canadian school system. It also gave them the confidence to approach a teacher or principal if they had questions. One parent was empowered to participate in her parent school council for two years. Each school will receive a copy of the handbook.

Interestingly, Preston Secondary School's parent council is currently conducting a survey to better understand why parents are not volunteering and/or participating on parent council. They have incorporated aspects of this handbook to help develop the survey and have included questions targeted specifically to newcomer parents. Other parent councils are incorporating aspects of this handbook into a welcome package for new parents.

c. Enhanced Language Training Program for Teachers

In partnership with Citizenship and Immigration Canada, a new program for landed immigrants to Canada, who are university-trained educators, was established to assist individuals in gaining teaching opportunities. These individuals are either going through the process of being recertified to teach in Ontario or have obtained their certification. This course provides 200 hours of training focused in Canadian teaching strategies, interview techniques, diversity in the classroom, etc. Fifty monitored practicum hours of teaching are provided to those educators who are recertified to teach in Ontario.

This program began in March and the two individuals who are Ontario certified were granted interviews for the occasional teacher list. A second program will run in the fall. Participants have found the experience extremely valuable and felt it provided them with important tips on how to better prepare themselves for interviews.

d. Kitchener-Waterloo Holocaust Education Committee

The Holocaust Education Committee (HEC) consists of local volunteers who develop and sponsor Holocaust Education events in the Waterloo Region for both students and educators to bring increased awareness and understanding about the impacts of discrimination, racism, prejudice, etc. This committee holds an annual education event in May for high school students between Grade 10 and Grade 12. The morning involves a plenary speaker or educational movie and the afternoon involves smaller student discussion groups with Holocaust survivors. These afternoon discussions focus not only on the impacts of the Holocaust, but expand to discussions on racism, prejudice, discrimination, etc. and how students can affect change. The event in May 2007 was well attended by over 500 students and was well received by both students and teachers.

The local HEC also provides sponsorship for students and teachers to attend the Toronto Facing History in Ourselves workshop at the end of August, which provides students the opportunity to learn more about the effects of discrimination, racism, and prejudice and how they can affect change. For the teachers, there are workshops demonstrating pedagogical strategies, tools, and

resources that can be used in the classroom. The feedback from teachers has been that the tools, resources, and strategies are extremely beneficial for their classroom and gave them a different approach to teaching.

e. YMCA Cross Cultural and Community Services

The YMCA has a dedicated resource to partner with schools to offer diversity workshops and a School Host Club to assist immigrant and refugee students to integrate. The premise of the Host Club program is to match a newcomer student with volunteer students to help newcomer students adjust to Canada by enabling them to integrate through friendship. Again, a lot of positive feedback has been received about the services provided through the YMCA.

f. Skills International

There is a website www.skillsinternational.ca that identifies qualified candidates who have immigrated as newcomers to Canada. This could be leveraged to fill various available positions at the Waterloo Region DSB.

g. New Canadian Program

This program provides foreign trained professionals who are new to Canada with the opportunity to gain Canadian employment experience. Again, this can be leveraged at the Waterloo Region DSB and has been done so in the Plant Maintenance department.

h. Homework Support Program

Every Tuesday and Thursday night, a homework support program is offered by the African-Canadian Association of the Waterloo Region and Somali-Canadian Association of Waterloo Region to provide support to students from Grades 4 to 12 of the African-Canadian community

i. Bridges - KW Counselling

A new program is being established at KW Counselling called “Bridges”. This program is aimed at working with newcomer immigrants and refugees in the Waterloo Region. Further discussion is required to determine how the Waterloo Region DSB could partner with this program.

II. GLBT-Q Community Partners

a. OK2BME – K-W Counselling

A program for GLBT-Q kids and teens between the ages of 5 and 18 providing the opportunity to meet with a GLBT-Q positive counselor, free of charge; participate in local social or recreational groups; participate in educational groups to learn more about issues of concern.

Brooke Young, the Coordinator of this program offers a wealth of information and a wonderful resource for administrators, teachers, etc. She can also assist schools in establishing and running a Gay-Straight Alliance.

The Waterloo Region DSB and Waterloo Catholic DSB are hoping to partner with OK2BME around an anti-homophobia bullying campaign at all secondary schools in Waterloo Region. The grant-funding announcement is pending.

III. A Success Story – ONE KCI

Some schools have taken the initiative to partner with their surrounding community to enhance the school community. An excellent example of this is **KCI**, who launched their “ONE KCI” strategic plan, which included:

- Partnering with existing businesses to enhance student success. For example, one student who was caught shoplifting at Central Meat Market was given community service at the store instead of being charged by the police. This student is now a part-time employee at the store while attending KCI.
- There was a participative process used for changing the school's mascot from an inappropriate depiction of an aboriginal to a pirate, which included communication around inclusivity, a student submission, and a voting process.

KCI clearly exemplifies an inclusive approach to engaging its entire school community.

With commitment from system leaders, educators, and parent school councils, connecting with newcomer parents and marginalized students is possible. The impact will not only affect the student, but it will also affect overall student achievement and the school community as a whole. This impact is even greater when the Waterloo Region DSB continues to partner with the community.

5.0 SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS EQUITY, INCLUSION & DIVERSITY

After extensive research and consultation, some key recommendations to address equity, inclusion and diversity have emerged for further consideration. In order to propel forward the board's vision of equity and inclusion in its policy statement, the Waterloo Region DSB community must know that senior administration are deeply invested in the endeavour. Clear strategies supporting this vision, focused on learning, caring, and connecting, will help to drive the systemic change at the Waterloo Region DSB to address the identified gaps around equity, inclusion, and diversity. The following provides recommendations for consideration that could be used to implement this vision.

5.1 Learning Recommendations

System-Wide Learning

1. Provision of books for the classroom to explicitly address equity, inclusion, and diversity are recommended. These could include Social Justice Literacy Kits and others recommended by Program Staff.
2. Consistently across the system, increased in-service communication with administrators is required on how to use the Waterloo Region District School Board Selection of Educational Resources guide when dealing with parental backlash around resources introduced around equity, inclusion, and diversity (i.e., sexual orientation).
3. Equity, inclusion, and diversity professional development needs to be built into the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) to assist new teachers in developing strategies to address the full spectrum of students in their classrooms.
4. Existing relevant Ministry of Education documents need to be available or their use reinforced in every school. There is extensive information on how to better build inclusive classroom environments and school communities in many Ministry documents. Excellent resource documents include Many Roots, Many Voices, Finding Common Ground: Character Development in Ontario Schools, and Literacy Curriculum Guidelines. It is recommended that System Leaders encourage the use of these documents.
5. Other Ontario school boards have excellent curriculum documents and resources that embed lesson plans about social justice into the existing Ontario curriculum by grade level. It would be beneficial to leverage these existing resources and tailor them to the needs of the Waterloo Region DSB.
6. A centralized list of available books, resources, tools, upcoming events and professional development related to social justice that all staff could access would be helpful.

Ethnoculturalism

1. Resources, tools, and professional development (PD) focused on ethnoculturalism need to be developed. In particular, a multi-faith/multi-cultural resource calendar outlining days of significance, a description of the event/celebration and additional resource information would help to increase awareness about non-Christian celebrations. Also, a community contact list of speakers who could speak to these days of significance would benefit teachers and/or administrators. Finally, a review and potential update of the Guideline for Use in Planning for the Recognition of Religious and Cultural Days of Significance in

Schools (AP7020) would also assist administrators and teachers in the proper observance of religious and cultural days of significance.

2. Organizing a multi-cultural and multi-lingual book fair that fairly reflects different cultures and languages would benefit not only ELL educators and school librarians, who might have difficulty sourcing these books, but also parents who might be interested in purchasing books to read with their children. It would also be beneficial to include books about sexual orientation and same-sex families. Partnering with ETFO and OSSTF would further support this recommendation.
3. Mandatory training for *all staff* on ethnoculturalism and potentially anti-oppression/anti-racism would assist all staff when dealing with their colleagues, students, and parents who might be a visible minority or who might be a newcomer to Canada. This training could be combined with awareness around providing a “positive space” and supporting the GLBT-Q community in the school system, which will be discussed further.
4. A central reception/welcome centre to assess all newcomer students to Waterloo Region would be extremely beneficial provided that the ELL services and courses of each school are clearly understood while assessing each student. A centralized service would increase the consistency of assessments and would reinforce the ongoing partnership with the Settlement Workers.
5. The Ministry of Education Aboriginal Education Strategy for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education needs to be reviewed to ensure the Waterloo Region DSB meets the Ministry requirements. Preliminary discussions are taking place with the Ministry on June 4, 2007.

GLBT-Q

Mandatory training for *all staff* on GLBT-Q needs to be developed. This training needs to include how to provide a “positive space”, how to develop a Gay-Straight Alliance in schools to support students, how to address homophobic language in schools, how to introduce sexual orientation books and discussions in the classroom, how to handle parental backlash, and how to support students and/or staff that are questioning and/or coming out. The end goal of this training would be to have positive space posters in every principal’s and vice-principal’s office, guidance office, and classroom. This would ensure that students and/or staff knew who was “gay positive” in their schools in case students and/or staff needed someone to speak with confidentially.

5.2 Caring Recommendations

Character Development Education

1. It is evident that equity, inclusion, and diversity are a part of character development education. Therefore, as the character development education curriculum is established for the Waterloo Region DSB, explicit focus on how to incorporate equity, inclusion, and diversity into the curriculum needs to be considered. Some examples of how to do this are included in the learning recommendations. Additional suggestions include the following:
 - i. Continue to implement system-wide Restorative Justice (RJ) training to encourage its use in classroom discussions and employee relations’ issues that involve equity, inclusion, and diversity to provide a respectful and open place for dialogue. Leverage these circles when discipline and/or bullying issues arise due to equity, inclusion, and diversity. Consistently in the consultation process, individuals indicated that issues of equity, inclusion, and diversity would not be as prevalent if we all learned how to have open, yet respectful conversations – RJ provides the opportunity for this to happen.

- ii. Leverage C3 Reps in each school to provide ongoing awareness around social justice to all school staff.
- iii. Review the bullying statistics, particularly the outcome of the secondary school bullying survey to determine if bullying is due to racism/religion or sexual orientation. Task each school with developing strategies to address their bullying issues. Understanding the reasons for bullying (e.g., racism, religious affiliation, classism or sexual orientation) should also be built into the elementary bullying survey.
- iv. Revive the *Equity and Inclusion Leadership Camps* for high school students (formerly known as Student Race Relations/Equity Leadership camp) to build character of inclusion, respect, and global citizenship in our students. Interestingly, students who participated in the former Student Race Relations/Equity Leadership Camps have gone on to do equity and inclusion work, including the new Equity Officer for the Ottawa Carleton District School Board.

Hiring Practices

A recruitment strategy needs to be established to attract and recruit more visible minorities into the Waterloo Region DSB. This strategy should include revising and updating the Waterloo Region DSB's recruitment and selection process to ensure it is inclusive. It should also include appropriate training for all administrators to ensure their recruitment strategies and questions are not biased towards eurocentric backgrounds. Finally, a strong partnership with Teacher's Colleges and partnering with the Enhanced Language Training Program for Teachers might provide a proactive approach to attracting visible minority candidates. Also, the nepotism policy should be carefully reviewed to ensure equitable recruitment and selection practices are used with family members.

Role of Principal, Vice-Principal, and Teacher

1. Accountabilities for equity, inclusion, and diversity need to be clearly established in everyone's roles. These accountabilities should be built into performance appraisals. For example, the Ministry of Education defines "equity and inclusion look-fors" in a teachers' performance reviews. The Waterloo Region DSB could further enhance these forms by clearly defining what these equity and inclusion look-fors look like at the school board.
2. Demonstrated experience in implementing equity, inclusion, and diversity strategies in the classroom and school community should be used as evaluation criteria when interviewing potential principal candidates. It would be extremely beneficial to have specific equity and inclusion topics included as part of the Waterloo Region DSB recruitment and selection process. This would ensure principal candidates have the proper training before leading a school community.
3. A framework of scenarios and associated questions with appropriate responses to address potential equity, inclusion, and diversity issues would also be a beneficial tool for superintendents and administrators. An example might include how to address a parent who is upset about books related to same-sex families being introduced in an elementary classroom.

Policy and Procedures

1. The equity and inclusion policy, new anti-bullying and anti-harassment procedure and the annual accessibility plan need to be widely communicated across the system. This will ensure all staff, students and parents know the steps to take in the event they have a

concern. It is particularly important for staff to know who they can speak with when they are not comfortable speaking with their manager. Also, the ethnocultural procedure needs to be reviewed and potentially updated to ensure it aligns with equity and inclusion policy and the anti-bullying and anti-harassment procedure. Basically, it needs to be evident to staff that the Waterloo Region DSB have policies and procedures in place to support their employees.

2. Within the education centre, more visible communication is required around how staff and/or visitors access the second floor in building 2, as the freight lift requires a key. Some staff members require access to the second floor computer lab and/or lamination services and they are unable to use the stairs.

Engage the Whole School Community

A resource kit that provides tools, resources and literature on how to create a “welcoming” school would be beneficial. There are simple steps that could be taken, including conducting a cultural mosaic survey, similar to Forest Heights Collegiate to understand the existing school community. Once this information is obtained, further “welcoming” strategies can be established.

5.3 Connecting Recommendations

Equity & Inclusion Advisory Group (EIAG)

- An EIAG needs to be established at the Waterloo Region DSB with the following four mandates:
 - i. To provide feedback to the Waterloo Region DSB on issues related to equity, inclusion and diversity.
 - ii. To participate with the Waterloo Region DSB in developing a more inclusive and representative curriculum and program reflective of all backgrounds.
 - iii. To determine strategies to engage parents and students from marginalized groups.
 - iv. To carefully consider the recommendations of this report and determine priorities and strategies for implementation.
- It is recommended that the EIAG should not have more than 15 representatives, but ideally have representation from the following: trustee, superintendent (Program or HR), elementary and secondary school principal, WRAPSC representative, English language learner (ELL) representative, student trustee, federation(s), multi-faith group representation, multi-cultural group representation, GLBT-Q representation, and community group representation.

Connecting with Newcomer and Same-sex Parents

1. It is imperative that school communities and school councils continue to develop strategies to engage newcomer parents. There are many resources and tools available to assist with this process including the Leadership Training Handbook and Many Roots, Many Voices. Newcomer parents need to feel welcome in schools, through multilingual signs in schools, newsletters, websites, and translation services.
2. Schools need to continue to determine creative ways to reach out to the parents and overcome the barriers to participation (e.g. provide childcare, bus tickets, etc.). Partnering with the Settlement Workers or other Waterloo Region DSB staff to hold parent workshops to assist newcomer parents in developing a better understanding about the Canadian education system would be helpful. Similar to other schools, school councils can also

conduct surveys to understand why parents are not participating in their children's education and develop solutions to address the survey outcomes.

3. Schools also need to increase their sensitivity to same-sex parents and ensure that schools create a positive space. Administrators and support staff need to be particularly sensitive when same-sex parents are registering their children, as the forms are heterosexually focused. This can create the perception of an unsupportive school environment if the registration process is not handled appropriately. It is hoped that these forms will be revised in the future to be more inclusive.

Leveraging Community Partners

There are numerous community resources the Waterloo Region DSB can continue to partner with to enhance their strategies and implementation plans around equity, inclusion and diversity. For a complete list of community partners, please refer to the consultation process under Connecting (p. 20).

Focal Points for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity

To assist in the implementation of the above suggestions, the final recommendation would be to have focal points through which issues related to equity, inclusion, and diversity are coordinated. Ideally, those involved would be educated in social justice and have direct experience in implementing social justice systemically in an education environment both in programming and the development and implementation of related policy, procedures, and professional development, in collaboration with learning services (program and special education) and human resources. This would provide profile and exposure and identifiable "entry-points" for those with concerns.

Although the list of recommendations is extensive, some of them can be done with minimal cost and effort; however, they all require an understanding of individual school communities to address each school's unique needs. The successful implementation of these recommendations will not only support the Waterloo Region DSB System Success Plan, but it will also enable bridges of equity, inclusion, and diversity to be built and inviting schools to be created.

WATERLOO REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

POLICY STATEMENT

Equity and Inclusion

The Waterloo Region District School Board is committed to the principles of equity through inclusive programs, curriculum, services, and operations in accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Education Act, and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is the policy of the Board to create and maintain an environment where every student, employee, parent, community member, and trustee has the right to freedom from discrimination or harassment because of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, family status, or ability.

The Board values the contribution of all members of our diverse community of students, staff, parents, and community groups to our mission and key priorities. The Board supports the diversity of students, staff, and parents that make up its school community.

The Board's policies, procedures and practices will be developed, understood, implemented, and continually evaluated to ensure fair and equitable educational, social, and employment opportunities for students, staff and community partners. The Board will seek out and remove systemic and attitudinal barriers and biases to learning and employment opportunities that have a discriminatory effect on any individual.

In order to provide a safe, inclusive environment free from inequity, discrimination and harassment, implementation plans will be developed to address the following ten major areas of focus:

- Board policies, guidelines, and practices;
- leadership;
- school-community partnership;
- curriculum;
- student languages;
- student evaluation, assessment, and placement;
- guidance and counselling;
- harassment including that related to race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethno cultural background, citizenship, religion, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, family status, and/or ability;
- employment practices; and
- staff development.

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