

June 7, 2022

Angelica Quesada
Director of Research and Evaluation
John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights
Via email: angelica@jhcentre.org

Dear Ms. Quesada,

Sharing Edmonton Public Schools' work toward making schools anti-racist

Thank you for sharing the Action Alberta Edmonton report *Calling Ourselves to Justice*, which details the group's work to outline the opportunities for schools to eliminate racism and discrimination. This is work to which our Board and Division are deeply committed. While the report cited some of the work happening in our Division, we want to share with you further highlights of the ways in which we are working toward addressing the areas of concern cited in the report.

In June 2020, our Board publicly acknowledged that racism and discrimination exists in our Division and that we have work to do. As a public school division, we are committed to being a place where every student and staff person feels they belong. Our commitment compels us to do the work of promoting anti-racism and inclusion. As a publicly elected board of Trustees we are committed to listening, learning and collaborating, so that our schools are welcoming, caring, respectful and safe places for every one of our students, staff and families.

In June of 2021, our Board approved an [Anti-racism and Equity Policy](#). This policy was the culmination of over two years of work in collaboration with community, staff and students. It cements our Board's belief that every student can reach their full potential, and acknowledges that respect for, and responsiveness to, students' lived experience, culture, and language is fundamental to their success.

It goes on to specify that deliberate and strategic efforts are required to ensure the success and achievement of all students, and that the Board commits to this through:

- Supporting an environment where students' diverse histories, identities, and lived experiences are valued and recognized as part of their success, engagement, and belonging in schools.
- Building staff capacity to review, identify, and use resources and materials that represent the cultural diversity of the community.
- Engaging with staff, family, educational institutions, community members and cultural groups to support student success and provide culturally meaningful opportunities to learn in a way that brings unique voices and lived experiences to the curriculum and their learning.

We know that our schools are microcosms of our communities and that racism is complex and deeply entrenched. Therefore, eliminating it will require a long-term, multi-faceted approach. Knowing this, our Division has embarked on many initiatives to make ours a more anti-racist, equitable Division. All our work is guided by our cornerstone values of accountability, collaboration, equity and integrity.

We firmly believe that this work must be done in community and that the voices of those most affected must lead the work. This belief led us to establish the first Anti-racism and Equity Advisory Committee in 2020. Comprising parents, students, community members, staff and Trustees, this group was charged with advising the Superintendent on the collection of extended student demographic data.

The Division also established an Anti-Racism and Equity Steering Committee composed of staff from various central units, and an Anti-Racism and Equity Principal Committee, with representation across all grades and areas of the city. These groups, with input from community and staff listening circles, developed the Division's [Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan](#).

The plan outlines three key areas of work for the 2021–22 school year: support for schools, hiring practices and staff engagement, and student demographic data.

Teachers and school staff have an important role in helping students understand and navigate complex racial injustices happening today and throughout our shared colonial history. To support them in this work, the plan recommends the following actions:

- Provide professional learning opportunities on anti-racism, equity and diversity
- Review Division-developed resources through the lens of diversity
- Establish a response team to help schools with their anti-racism and equity efforts
- Help schools make positive connections with community members that offer culturally meaningful learning and enrichment opportunities

Work has begun on all of these recommendations. The Division's Diversity Education and First Nations, Metis and Inuit units have offered professional learning to Division leadership and staff on a wide variety of topics throughout the year. Our Trustee Policy Review Committee has begun a review of all policies and administrative regulations through an anti-racist lens. An Anti-racism Critical Support Team (ARCS) consisting of racially and ethnically diverse members who can support conversations with schools, families and community members, has been formed to support to schools when a serious incident occurs that is perceived to be racist or discriminatory. Our Division's Intercultural Consultants also support families and school leaders by facilitating conversations, helping navigate cultural norms, translating, and providing connections to community resources. Schools are connecting with community members such as artists in residence, guest speakers, project leaders, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, craftspeople and land-based teaching practitioners to enhance instruction and build awareness.



We are also proud of the work our Student Senate has done to help students and staff better understand racism and become allies and anti-racism advocates. Over the past two years, they have [developed](#) workshops, club packages, podcasts, a magazine, and online events.

Through professional learning sessions, school staff have learned about the OECD report [Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students](#) and have been encouraged to incorporate its recommendations into their practice. This work is supported by the Division's First Nations, Metis and Inuit unit, a lead teacher program, and high school completion coaches. Our Board has also supported this work by writing to the Education Minister [requesting](#) that anti-racism be embedded within the K-6 curriculum and that more diverse voices be employed in the development of the new curriculum. The Board of Trustees is also committed to creating a more inclusive school calendar, recognizing a number of specific holy days or days of significance for the students and families we serve.

To ensure staff and families see themselves reflected in our workforce, the Plan recommends the following actions:

- Review our hiring practices and the regulations that guide those practices through an anti-racism and equity lens
- Review our leadership development program and how we can increase diversity in our leadership staff
- Review how to incorporate anti-racism and equity perspectives when training new teachers

Focused discussions with racialized teachers and newly hired teachers have already taken place to better understand their experiences and perspectives. Our HR unit has also collaborated with a variety of stakeholders to update the Division's Diversity and Equity Hiring Statement. Work with post-secondary institutions has been happening for several years to find ways to encourage a greater diversity of individuals to see teaching as an attractive profession.

The third pillar of the Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan is the collecting of additional student demographic data to help us gain a deeper understanding of students and their needs. A multi-disciplinary team has been collaborating with staff, students and community over the past year to prepare to collect data this fall; a first for any school division in Alberta.

We appreciate the report highlighting the need for increased government funding to support data collection and training. We agree with the report's finding that these are critical actions; however, taking such action is increasingly difficult with our Division's growing enrolment and the government's frozen education budget. In the coming year alone, Edmonton Public Schools will be faced with educating 1700 students for whom we will not receive funding. Despite this, we have committed funds in our 2022-2023 budget to ensure our anti-racism efforts can continue.

As a Division, we have also been building partnerships to enhance our own understanding and help reach individuals who may not access our usual communication channels. We have forged strong relationships with ethnic and cultural organizations, social agencies and community advocacy groups.



We would be interested in exploring with you the ways in which we could collaborate to help strengthen both of our efforts to create a more just and equitable world. If this is of interest to you, I invite you to contact me so that we can set a time to meet and discuss next steps.

Sincerely,



Trisha Estabrooks
Board Chair

