

**DATE:** March 21, 2023

**TO:** Board of Trustees

**FROM:** Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

**SUBJECT:** Strategic Plan Update Report: Priority Two  
Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan - Year One Update

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## ISSUE

Strategic Plan Update Reports are one way of reporting to the Board of Trustees progress across the three priority areas of the Division's Strategic Plan. This Strategic Plan Update Report provides an overview of Division efforts in support of The Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan and reflects progress in support of Priority 2 of the [2022-26 Division Strategic Plan](#), "Advance action towards anti-racism and reconciliation".

## BACKGROUND

The Edmonton Public Schools Board of Trustees issued their [Board Statement on Anti-racism and Inclusion](#) on June 4, 2020. In response to this statement, the voices of staff and students and the urgency within the community to address racism and reconciliation, the Division embarked on a multi-year commitment to work intentionally toward anti-racism, reconciliation and equity through continuous action, learning and improvement. Priority 2, Goal 1 of the [2022-26 Division Strategic Plan](#) calls for the Division to work with students, staff, families and communities to update and advance the Division's [Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan](#) each year. The actions outlined in the plan are intended to lead to authentic and meaningful long-term systemic change. This work is in support of Board Policies [HAAB.BP Anti-racism and Equity](#) (June 2021) and [HAA.BP First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education](#), aligns with the Division's Cornerstone Values of Accountability, Collaboration, Equity and Integrity and reflects the Division's commitment to student success.

The action plan was introduced in the fall of the 2021-2022 school year and was structured around three key areas of focus, as noted below. The development of the plan was informed by feedback from staff, students, families and members of the community.

1. Support for schools and enhancing school capacity.
2. A focus on Human Resource practices and the engagement of all staff.
3. The development of a model to support the collection of extended student demographic data.

**CURRENT SITUATION**

The Division's efforts toward anti-racism, reconciliation and equity reflect a multi-year commitment. The action plan serves as a guide to assist in keeping the work moving forward and as a means of communication to support awareness around key areas of the work and progress being made.

The Division reviews the action plan on an ongoing basis and commits to communicating around progress and next steps in this work. Information on epsb.ca will be updated to include year one progress and the next steps outlined in the year one update report.

**KEY POINTS**

- This report reflects progress towards Priority 2 of the Strategic Plan and provides an overview of year one's actions in support of the Division's Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan.
- These actions reflect the Division's commitment to anti-racism, reconciliation and equity.
- The voice of staff, students, families and community members have helped inform this work.

**ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES**

ATTACHMENT I      Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan - Year One Update

APPENDIX I        Increasing Diversity in Leadership: Analysis of Focus Group Discussions with Aspiring and Formal Leaders

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# **Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan**

## ***Year One Update***

*March 2023*



EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

# Introduction

The Edmonton Public Schools Board of Trustees issued their [Board Statement on Anti-racism and Inclusion](#) on June 4, 2020. In response to this statement, the voices of staff and students and the urgency within the community to address racism and reconciliation, the Division embarked on a multi-year commitment to work intentionally toward anti-racism and equity through continuous action, learning and improvement. Priority 2, Goal 1 of the [2022-26 Division Strategic Plan](#) calls for the Division to work with students, staff, families and communities to update and advance the Division's [Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan](#) each year. The actions outlined in the plan are intended to lead to authentic and meaningful long-term systemic change. This work is in support of Board Policies [HAAB.BP Anti-racism and Equity](#) (June 2021) and [HAA.BP First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education](#), aligns with the Division's Cornerstone Values of Accountability, Collaboration, Equity and Integrity, and reflects the Division's commitment to student success.

## Overview

The Division believes that listening to, and learning from, students, staff, families and community is critical to understanding what is important. These voices have helped inform actions initiated in support of anti-racism, reconciliation and equity. Engagement has been and will continue to be important at every stage of the Division's multi-year path to progress. Based on this ongoing feedback, three key areas were prioritized in the initial development of the action plan and in the identification of next steps for each area:

1. Support for schools and enhancing school capacity.
2. A focus on Human Resource practices and the engagement of all staff.
3. The development of a model to support the collection of extended student demographic data.

This report serves as the opportunity to communicate with stakeholders, including the Board of Trustees, an update on actions taken in the 2021–2022 school year and share our next steps. The report has been structured around each of the three key areas of the action plan.



# Support for Schools and Enhancing School Capacity

*“Things are moving forward; a lot of these conversations weren’t happening even five years ago, so it is important to keep moving forward.”*

– Student Participant, Listening Circle spring 2021

Supporting and enhancing school capacity in the areas of anti-racism and equity involves multiple layers of listening, learning, unlearning and relearning. The provision of ongoing professional learning that supports personal growth and professional practice is necessary as we strive to learn more about the students we serve.

**The following actions were taken in the 2021–2022 school year in the area of Support for Schools and Enhancing School Capacity:**

- **Introduced the Anti-racism Critical Support Team as a resource to schools**  
To support school administration in navigating emergent incidents that are reported to be racist or discriminatory, the Anti-racism Critical Support (ARCS) Team was introduced in the fall of 2021. This team was comprised of trained racially and ethnically diverse members who can support conversations with staff, students, families and community members in an effort to work towards resolution of complex situations. They provide cross-disciplinary support to schools and are trained in restorative justice and mediation techniques. For situations needing specialized supports and with consultation from other Division areas (e.g., Division Support Services, Communications, Intercultural Consultants, Specialized Learning Supports school-linked teams ) an [ARCS Team Action Plan](#) template was created to be utilized and customized to address the emergent situation and school context. In its first year, the ARCS Team was a valued resource and responded to nine requests from schools.
- **Introduced the multi-faith calendar**  
Students, staff, families and community members have shared the importance of the school calendar representing the diversity of Division stakeholders and the days of significance that are important to them. As a result, the Division introduced a [multi-faith calendar](#) for schools to use to support welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy learning and working environments for students, staff and families. The multi-faith calendar is intended to be a planning tool for schools to help minimize conflict of exams, assignments etc. with days of significance for students. Knowing the needs of their communities, school staff can use the calendar as a reference when planning school events, student exams and project deadlines.
- **Supported the work to review [GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar](#)**  
Hearing from staff, students, families and members of the community reinforced the importance of having the Division’s yearly operational calendar include a variety of cultural and religious holidays that better reflect the diversity of staff and students. In working towards a more inclusive calendar the Division reviewed feedback gathered by the community around key days of significance, added questions related to the calendar as part of the 2021–2022 Division Feedback Survey and the review of [GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar](#) was identified on the Board of Trustees’ Policy Review Committee’s annual work plan. Administration used this feedback to help inform the preparation of the [2023–2024 calendar report](#), which was brought forward for approval at the June 7, 2022 Board meeting.

- **Provided a range of professional learning sessions for Division staff**

The Division developed and implemented a range of professional learning (PL) sessions throughout the 2021-2022 school year. The sessions were intended to build awareness and help staff weave the values of equity and inclusion into instruction and everyday actions. Feedback from year one participants and from the Anti-Racism and Equity Principal Committee helped to identify areas of PL that would be required to support ongoing progress toward becoming an anti-racist organization. This includes the development of a set of asynchronous resources principals could use with their school community around key areas of anti-racism work. The following is a snapshot of some of the key areas of PL staff have been participating in:



- Allyship and inclusion
- Bias and microaggressions
- Creating a welcoming learning environment through a First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspective
- Foundational definitions and understandings of anti-racism
- Intersectionality
- Project-based learning through a First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspective
- Treaties and agreements with First Nations
- Truth, Reconciliation and Residential schools
- Weaving foundational knowledge through literacy text

Professional Learning was made available to Division staff through a variety of means, including, but not limited to: early dismissal Thursday sessions; Division PL days; consultant support; pre-and post-Division Leadership Meeting sessions; Black History month supports; National Truth and Reconciliation Day supports; school level and catchment initiatives in support of awareness and capacity building, and asynchronous learning resources.

- **Establishment of school level anti-racism and equity teams**

Aligned with the Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan and the sense of urgency within schools to address inequity and racism, a number of schools created an anti-racism and equity team to support this work within the school community. These school level teams were instrumental in promoting school cultures that support belonging and inclusion and reflected the participation of staff and students. As a result of the grassroots interest in this work, it took a range of pathways forward and was supported through the collaborative efforts of central decision units, catchments and schools.



- **Developed a draft Anti-racism and Equity toolkit**

This resource is being developed to support schools in creating an environment of anti-racism that recognizes diversity as a strength and values the diversity across school communities, the Division and the broader community. Fundamentally, it upholds the Division's commitment to developing positive relationships with staff, families and community members and working together in support of student success. Grounded in the Division's strategic direction, the toolkit aligns with Division policy [HAAB.BP Anti-racism and Equity](#) and is a supportive document that can be easily accessed by any Division staff member.

The draft toolkit, scheduled for release in the 2022–2023 school year, will contain information and links to support schools in the areas of anti-racism and culturally responsive practices and sexual orientation and gender identity and expression support. The comprehensive toolkit will provide staff with access to a variety of resources to support anti-racism work, including information on the Division's board policies and administrative regulations, anti-racism learning resources, curricular links and information on the multi-faith calendar. It will also provide schools with clarity around the supports available through the Division's Diversity Team, including a direct link for requesting consultant support and first language supports.

Beyond the toolkit, there are a range of additional resources available to staff related to both of these areas, as well as resources that develop foundational knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures, worldviews, histories and current realities.

## **Next steps...**

- Continue to build capacity at school, catchment and Division levels through professional learning opportunities focused on key areas or themes related to anti-racism, reconciliation and equity.
  - This will include the introduction of processes and resources to support schools in continuing to build confidence and capacity within school communities
- Gather input from staff, students and community members to inform foundational professional learning topics for Division staff.
- Continue to communicate the availability and support of the ARCS Team.
- Explore curricular links and learning opportunities that build connection, support belonging and develop intercultural understanding for students and staff.
- Enhance communication and awareness around current avenues for students and families to report incidents of racism
- Extend the information provided through the multi-faith calendar and continue to build Division staff's awareness of the calendar and how best to use it as a resource.
- The Policy Review Committee continues the work to review and revise [GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar](#). This work will include additional opportunities for engagement.

# Human Resource Practices

*“My hope is for the courage to continue the conversation below the surface of the cultural iceberg. Conversations that challenge our beliefs and assumptions so that we can bring our whole selves to work.”*

*– Division Staff Member, Staff Collaborative Conversation December 2021*

Edmonton Public Schools serves diverse students, families and staff. It is important that students and families see themselves represented within the Division’s staff. Engagement and collaboration with staff supported key actions taken in support of this area. The Division’s success is both a collective and individual responsibility for all members of the organization.

## **The following actions were taken in the 2021–2022 school year in the area of Human Resource (HR) Practices:**

- **Developed and refined a Diversity and Inclusivity Statement**

Significant work was done to explore and support the crafting of a statement that represents the Division’s beliefs around diversity and inclusion. The statement was created after researching best practices, examining diversity statements for other organizations and gathering feedback from a variety of stakeholder groups. The aim is to ensure existing staff and potential employees feel the statement represents the Division as an inclusive and equitable workplace, an attractive work environment and an employer that embraces diversity. This statement, as highlighted below, was implemented in October 2022 and serves as a reflection of what the Division offers and what it aspires to be.

We are listening, we are learning and we are committed. Edmonton Public Schools aspires to be a learning community where every individual:

- ***Belongs***
- ***Is included***
- ***Experiences success***

We strive to empower staff to reach their goals in a diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace that values their lived experiences. We are seeking individuals like you, who reflect the students and families we serve. Together, we are stronger.

- **Hosted collaborative conversations with staff who identify as Black, Indigenous and People of Colour to learn about their lived experiences**

As part of the Division's ongoing conversations on anti-racism and equity, the Division hosted Staff Collaborative Conversations (SCC) in December 2021. The SCC provided staff the opportunity to share why the Division's work on anti-racism and equity is important and to suggest what the Division's path to progress could look like based on their own lived experience or personal perspectives.

Focus group discussions were held virtually in February 2022 with Black, Indigenous and People of Colour, who are in formal leadership positions or aspiring to leadership positions in the Division. Participants discussed their experiences seeking advancement opportunities and formal leaders shared perspectives of their experiences in leadership roles. Feedback from these discussions was summarized and is being used to inform HR practices that support aspiring leaders.



The feedback from these two engagement opportunities was documented and used to inform changes to HR practices this past year. This feedback will continue to be a source of staff voice in the ongoing work towards becoming an anti-racist organization.

- **Gathered feedback on Division teacher hiring practices to inform change**

Edmonton Public Schools is committed to hiring practices that are welcoming and equitable for all applicants. The Division values diversity and welcomes applications from all qualified individuals.

In January 2022, teachers newly hired within the last three years were invited, through a survey, to provide feedback on their application and interview experience. The information collected helped to inform changes to teacher hiring practices. This process will continue in the future through engagement with other staff groups.

Based on survey feedback, to support more individuals applying from diverse backgrounds, language in the hiring application has been updated to include the opportunity for an applicant to share their lived experience. This work also included reviewing and revising the rubric used for teacher applications through an anti-racist lens.

- **Initiated the development of a new leadership competency, including indicators related to leadership for anti-racism, reconciliation and equity**

The Division's competency-based Leadership Development Framework strives to ensure that staff have a common understanding of what it means to be a leader. The process to explore an anti-racism competency was initiated and will continue to develop with input from various stakeholders.

- **Initiated a review of curriculum for all leadership development cohort based programs**

As the Division moves forward with intentional efforts towards anti-racism and equity, integrating anti-racism content into the Leadership Development Framework and related programs will be a critical step. In year one, additional professional learning was included relative to anti-racism and reconciliation. Existing materials, visuals and graphics were also examined and revised to support this work.

- **Revised the Aspiring Principal Development Program Application Rubric through an anti-racism and equity lens**

The rubric used to evaluate applicants was examined and adjusted to better reflect leading a learning community in which diversity is embraced and a sense of belonging is emphasized to support success for all students. Additionally, the application was revised to include an introductory paragraph that upholds the Division's Anti-racism and Equity policy.

- **Initiated review of Board Policies and Administrative Regulations through an anti-racist and equity lens**

In support of Board Policy [HAAB.BP Anti-racism and Equity](#), a review was initiated of all Division Board Policies through an anti-racist and equity lens. This work is multi-year work and will also involve the review of administrative regulations. Through the anti-racism and equity work in the area of HR, administrative regulations were examined. The work to revise these documents is ongoing.

- **Developed diversity professional learning for managers working in the area of hiring**

To build their understanding and application of unconscious bias in hiring practices, a professional learning session was developed to support principals and other Division managers. The session was first offered for Division leaders starting in the fall of 2022. In total, the session has been made available three times throughout the 2022–2023 school year.

## Next steps...

- Establish a staff working group to help inform and support the Division's commitment to and progress towards reconciliation and being an anti-racist organization.
- Continue to use the feedback from the leadership and staff collaborative conversations to determine intentional actions that will support more Black, Indigenous and People of Colour to advance their careers in leadership.
- Start exploring the collection of staff and applicant extended demographic data.
- Continue updating administrative regulations to align with Board Policy [HAAB.BP Anti-racism and Equity](#).
- Enhance communication and awareness around current avenues for staff to report incidents of racism.
- Continue to offer and build upon PL for hiring managers.
- Explore developing tools or templates for HR leaders to use that support consistent approaches to hiring through an anti-racist and equity lens.
- Continue review and revision of hiring practices across all staff groups.

# Extended Student Demographic Data Collection

*“If we know better, we can do better - having these opportunities lets us do better. My hope is there comes a time when nobody is marginalized for any reason.”*

– Community Member, Listening Circle May 2021

Student success and well-being is at the heart of the Division’s work—striving to have all students feel safe, experience a sense of belonging at school and to grow and succeed as learners. One action to help the Division further enhance student success in school is to better understand how students identify themselves and then examine which students are thriving in school and which students need additional support.

September 22, 2020, the Board of Trustees [passed a motion](#) formally requesting that Edmonton Public Schools administration develop a model for the collection of data to better understand the self-described identities of students in the Division.

The planning and development process to inform this model was supported by ongoing consultation with staff, students and community organizations, examination of research and learning from other Canadian jurisdictions already collecting additional student demographic data. The result of this work was the implementation of the Extended Student Demographic Data (ESDD) Survey in the fall of 2022 with students in Grades 4 to 12.

***The following actions were taken in the 2021–2022 school year toward the development and implementation of a model to support the collection of extended student demographic data:***

- **Developed a working group to support the initiative**

In September 2021, a working group focused on developing a model for the collection of ESDD was established. This group was made up of staff from across various central decision units, bringing expertise in the areas of diversity education, First Nations Métis and Inuit education team, technology, student information, communications and research. The working group examined a broad range of factors critical to the initiative, such as:

- What questions around identity should be asked and why will this information be important?
- Should the data be anonymous or linked to student identity?
- How will this additional data inform action that will result in greater success for students?
- What are the Division’s legal responsibilities around the collection and protection of this data (ie. FOIP)?
- How should the data be gathered?
- What supports will schools need to implement the initiative?
- What engagement and communication with stakeholders will be critical to the success of this work?

To support the initiative, a project plan was developed and used to document each step of the process, including references to research, options for consideration, feedback from stakeholders and key decision points.

- **Engaged with staff, students and members of the community**

Honouring the complex nature of this work, the Division engaged multiple perspectives, including hearing from: the Anti-racism and Equity Steering Committee, the Anti-racism and Equity Principal Committee, members of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education and Diversity Teams, senior leadership, Student Senators, students, and community members representing diverse perspectives and the voice of families. These conversations informed the scope and development of student survey questions, determined the approach to having students complete the survey and strategies to support communication and readiness for implementing the survey with students.

- **Developed a set of questions to support additional information about the identity of students across the Division**

Following two years of consultation, research, planning and preparation, Edmonton Public Schools implemented its first student demographic data collection in October 2022. This work included careful consideration regarding what additional information about student identity could help the Division take action towards anti-racism and equity. A commitment was made to not ask questions without a clear understanding of how the resulting data could inform improvement. For this first time gathering additional information around student identity, it was determined that the following small set of questions (with a list of identity choices) would be asked of students in Grades 4 to 12:

- Do you identify as First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit?
- Which of the following best describes you?
- What ethnic or cultural origin(s) do you see yourself as?
- What is your religion and/or spiritual affiliation?
- Please describe your gender identity.
- Please describe your sexual orientation.

*(This question was asked of Grades 7 to 12 students only)*

These questions were asked of students through an online survey. To respect individual student and family comfort with sharing additional identity information with the Division, parents were able to request that their child not participate in the orientation session and extended student demographic survey. Parents were able to indicate their preference to the school through an email, phone call or conversation with school staff.

Additionally, all questions for students were voluntary, which meant participating students only answered the questions they felt comfortable answering. For each question, students were also able to choose to not answer the question at all or select a response of 'I prefer not to answer.'

- **Developed a variety of resources that supported survey implementation**

Communication was recognized as a critical factor to the success of this initiative. With this in mind, a key component of the model supporting the collection of ESDD included developing materials to support communication with principals, staff, families and students. A range of resources was developed, in consultation with both internal and external stakeholders. Examples of these materials included:

- A video to introduce the student survey and provide key information.
- Materials for principals to work with their staff in preparation of the survey.
- Materials for principals to support further conversations with families prior to the survey being implemented with students.
- Materials for teachers to use with their students to support a pre-survey orientation and materials to support the actual implementation of the survey.

- To support clarity and understanding, student glossaries were developed to help students with language and terminology used in the survey.

To support communicating with as many individuals as possible, key materials were translated into the 15 most common languages represented within the student population. Information regarding the survey was available on SchoolZone, epsb.ca and Connect (internal staff website); additionally, the Superintendent sent a letter out to all families and Division social media accounts were used to reach out to staff, students and families.

## Next Steps...

- A small team of Division staff will prepare for the reporting of preliminary results; this is a large data set as approximately 73 per cent of all students registered in Grades 4 to 12 as of September 30, 2022 participated in the survey (or approximately 55,850 students)
- Engage with stakeholders to inform how best to present the data in a manner that respects the identity of students and clearly communicates what students have shared with the Division through the survey.
- Develop a communication plan to support the release of initial results.
- Utilize preliminary results to inform further analysis of the data over subsequent school years looking at areas of safety, sense of belonging and academic outcomes.
- Through an evidence-based approach, use information from this data set to inform actions that will inform system improvement and greater success for all students.
- Take lessons learned through this work to inform the exploration of a model to support the collection of staff extended demographic data.



# Supporting the Work

*“It’s not so much what you say—it’s what you do. If families don’t see action around what’s being done about eliminating racism—if they don’t see their children being protected then it doesn’t matter what we say. It’s going to be important to demonstrate what’s being done.”*

– Community Member, Summer engagement 2022

The Division has planned, resourced and organized to support progress in support of the [Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan](#) and Board Policy [HAAB.BP Anti-racism and Equity](#). The steering committee and principal committee meet regularly to ensure that progress in each of the priority areas remains on track, to provide feedback on the work and to plan next steps. The Division also advertised and recruited to support the reestablishment of the Equity Advisory Committee, made up of parents and members of the community. Collectively, from across these three committees, the Division is supported by a diverse range of voices, perspectives and lived experiences. The work of each of these groups is guided by the action plan and supported through a Terms of Reference.



Beyond these formally established groups, this work has been supported and informed by the voices of staff, students and community members through various means of engagement. The interest and time invested by these individuals is a strong indication of the importance of this work and the shared commitment across the Edmonton community towards anti-racism and equity.

## Conclusion

The Anti-racism and Equity Action plan is a multi-year approach reflecting the Division’s commitment to reconciliation and becoming an anti-racist organization. The action plan is intended to be responsive and will be updated to reflect actions accomplished and critical next steps on the Division’s path to progress.

It is our hope that actions that have been taken and the future work that is set out in this plan will ultimately support a greater sense of belonging for students, staff and families. This work is a collaborative effort that is built on listening, learning and evidence-based decision-making.

The Division will continue to engage in meaningful ways with students, staff, families and community members to ensure that diverse lived experiences and perspectives inform the work. Ongoing communication regarding the progress of this action plan will support transparency and reinforce the Division’s unwavering commitment to anti-racism, reconciliation and equity.

*“The only way society can get to the healing is through knowing.”*

– Unknown, Division meeting spring 2022



# Increasing Diversity in Leadership

Analysis of Focus Group Discussions  
with Aspiring and Formal Leaders

February 2022

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# BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

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In June 2020, EPSB's Board of Trustees issued a [statement](#) acknowledging the existence of racism and discrimination in the Division, making a commitment to "listen, learn and collaborate" in order to promote anti-racism and inclusion via an updated multiculturalism education policy ("Board Statement", 2020). After the Board's public acknowledgement of systemic racism, Board Policy [HAAB.BP Anti-racism and Equity](#) was approved in 2021, affirming the commitment "To promote an environment of anti-racism that recognizes diversity as a strength and values diversity in its schools, staff and communities." The policy outlines an approach that engages schools, staff and communities served by the Division, "using evidence and data to better understand issues of racism and equity in Edmonton Public Schools, to inform decision-making and action and to monitor progress and outcomes of this ongoing work."

To support the implementation of the Board policy, an [Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan](#) was developed for the 2021-2022 school year, with the intent to update the plan on an annual basis. The action plan document outlines three areas of work being prioritized by the Division for 2021-2022. This report will focus on one of the activities described in the Division's priority of "Focus[ing] on Human Resource practices and the engagement of all staff." Specifically, the purpose of this report is to summarize a range of feedback gathered from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) that reflects the lived experiences of staff at EPSB who identify as a Black, Indigenous or a Person of Colour as they navigate the organization and work toward meeting their leadership goals. This report represents the voices of staff and a summary of their shared lived experiences as an aspiring leader within the organization. This feedback will help to inform what structures and processes should be in place to support all staff on their leadership journey and identify existing challenges or barriers. The FGDs included staff with a range of experience, from aspiring leaders to those already in formal leadership positions.

## METHODS

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An email was sent out to all staff in February informing them of the upcoming conversations and inviting staff who identify as a Black, Indigenous or Person of Colour to complete an expression of interest form if they wished to participate in one of the FGDs.

FGDs were held virtually using Google Meets between February 24 and 28, 2022, and invited people of colour working in the Division as formal and aspiring leaders to discuss four open-ended questions:

1. In our first round of conversation today we invite you to tell us about your leadership journey so far; what, if any, supports within Edmonton Public Schools have you found to be effective as you work toward your leadership goals?
2. Based on your personal experience within Edmonton Public Schools, what, if anything, has made it more difficult to move toward your formal leadership goals?
3. What is one thing Edmonton Public Schools can do to encourage more individuals from diverse backgrounds to apply for and successfully attain leadership positions?
4. After today's conversation, what makes you hopeful going forward?

The intention of these questions was to provide participants with the opportunity to delve into a number of issues related to experiences of employment and advancement in Edmonton Public Schools (EPSB), as well as to allow participants to share and listen to other perspectives to generate insight.

Participants were assigned to breakout rooms with four to five participants. Discussions were led by a facilitator, whose role it was to provide a welcoming, safe and non-judgemental space for participants, guide the conversation and ask for elaboration where needed. Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter being discussed, facilitators were provided with protocols to uphold conversation norms in the event of insensitive, harmful or racist comments. Notetakers were also present and tasked with supporting the facilitator in providing a welcoming and respectful discussion, while capturing the essence of feedback relayed to the group by participants. Participants were notified that in order to create a safe and respectful space to share feedback, names and other identifiable information were not included in the session notes to ensure confidentiality.

Over the two days, 37 participants who identified as formal leaders and 61 participants who identified as aspiring leaders attended the FGDs. Feedback from the FGD's also includes the voices of five formal leaders and 10 aspiring leaders who were involved in focus group discussion sessions as note takers or facilitators, and were given an opportunity to contribute to the conversation.

Data gathered by the notetakers in each conversation were collected and themed to capture the experiences of both aspiring and formal leaders. Each theme is discussed using the following format:

- Summary of responses
- Key points
- Discussion highlights

The summary of responses encapsulates the personal perspectives shared by participating aspiring leaders and formal leaders unless otherwise indicated. In some instances, comments from the note taker documents are included to further illuminate key points.

## ANALYSIS

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Four topics arose from the FGDs:

- Experiences of staff who identify as Black, Indigenous or a Person of Colour as they seek advancement in the organization.
- Division supports and professional networks that were/are beneficial and support equity for staff as they work toward their leadership goals.
- Barriers faced by participants as they navigate their professional career.
- Ways to improve the organization to increase diversity across leadership roles.

### Experiences

#### Summary of Responses

Aspiring leaders discussed their experiences seeking out advancement opportunities, while formal leaders discussed both their experiences with the advancement process and experiences acting in leadership roles. A lack of transparency about the advancement process was more frequently cited by aspiring leaders, though was also mentioned by formal leaders. Formal leaders were more likely to discuss the length of time it took to get through the advancement process and become a leader. Otherwise, all themes were consistent across aspiring and formal leaders.

## Key Points

When discussing experiences related to the advancement process, participants described:

- Uncertainty of how to bring up and address issues of racism, both at the individual and systemic level, through the advancement process and as Divisional leaders.
- Participants described experiencing microaggressions through the advancement process and while holding leadership positions.
- Perceptions that the advancement process was very lengthy.
- Discomfort related to an expectation to fit into the current leadership 'mould'.

## Discussion Highlights

### Hard to bring up and address issues of racism

Aspiring leaders spoke to challenges in bringing up issues of racism both towards them and towards others in the Division. Some indicated that as a result, this lowered their confidence or made them fearful to express themselves.

“Right now, I am working on my self confidence because when you talk in meetings, because of my accent, people tend to shut down my ideas which affects my self confidence. I have even been told by a parent to go back to where I came from. Sometimes, when I go to the schools, the office staff are not patient enough to listen to me but I try to play along and even offer to spell if that will help.”

Formal leaders expressed that it is challenging for them to bring up issues of racism in their positions.

“In a leadership role, it can still feel uncomfortable to address things that have an element of race or cultural bias. How are people in positions of leadership supposed to bring this up in a way that generates conversation instead of making people defensive or upset?”

Both aspiring and formal leaders spoke to the importance of training about anti-racism to be made available or even mandatory for staff.

### Microaggressions

Participants provided anecdotes about experiences of microaggressions and the impact these had on their well-being. Some examples of microaggressions included surprised comments from others about the participant holding a leadership position, comments about the participant's articulateness, mispronounced names and a sense that they are not taken as seriously because of biases.

“When they raise awareness of perspective as “cultural”, they have had situations where people have rolled their eyes at them and made them feel less than because they valued certain things in their culture; example: when they brought ethnic food for lunch and there are off the cuff comments such as ‘oh, you would be eating something like that’.”

### Process is lengthy

Formal leaders spoke to the lengthy process of attaining a leadership position. Participants shared a range of reasons for this, including the challenge of transitioning qualifications from an international setting, lengthy time to achieve a

formal contract with the Division, the limited availability of leadership positions in their area of experience/expertise and the large number of applicants applying for leadership positions.

“[...]feels stuck and cornered/limited into a particular program/school level (junior high). There isn’t a lot of opportunity to move to another position - you have to wait for someone to retire in order for a position to open up. This is particularly true of the languages program.”

### Discomfort fitting in

Though this theme was mentioned by two formal leaders, it was aspiring leaders who spoke to the discomfort of fitting into a divisional leadership ‘mould’. To this effect, participants described that they felt their way of being, doing and knowing were not necessarily accepted by the Division and that they would have to change this in order to advance. From one formal leader:

“There is a “fight” between who one is and who one feels they are expected to be (e.g., feeling they needed to fit into a box that they weren’t comfortable in fitting).”

There were also several comments that the participants’ way of speaking often resulted in them being labelled as ‘aggressive’ and that they had to make extra efforts to speak softly in order to feel accepted.

“People can take as many courses as possible to learn, but for some reason the slight differences in the way I say things creates my messaging to be more aggressive - even though the message is exactly the same as someone else would say something.”

## Supports and Professional Networks

### Summary of Responses

While both aspiring and formal leaders recognized that networks were a key component of a successful professional life at EPSB, aspiring leaders were more likely to be searching for meaningful work connections that could help them achieve their professional goals. Likewise, knowledge and utilization of valuable professional learning and leadership opportunities were more apparent for those participants classified as formal leaders. Both sets of respondents spoke about the connection between confidence and support from peers, supervisors and the Division as a whole. Many respondents voiced pride in working for EPSB and consider it to be a progressive organization.

#### Key Points

Responses from participants highlighted the following ways in which the Division encourages diverse staff to pursue their leadership goals:

- Support and mentorship from supervisors, Division leaders, and colleagues.
- Relationship building.
- Formal and informal leadership opportunities.
- Professional Learning (PL) opportunities.

## Discussion Highlights

### Support and mentorship

Many participants emphasized the important role of supervisors, Division leaders and colleagues in supporting their path to leadership. Examples include principals and supervisors supporting and encouraging staff to:

- Participate in PL and leadership programs.
- Complete a Master's degree.
- Take on informal leadership roles, new responsibilities, and initiatives.
- Apply to leadership positions.

Participants also spoke more generally about how strong relationships with their supervisors, colleagues and other leadership staff have made them feel supported by the Division. Participants emphasized this kind of support and encouragement made a difference in their journeys. Participants told stories of receiving encouragement and support from leaders who are people of colour and other staff in leadership positions. Several formal leaders also described how they strive to pay this encouragement forward by supporting their own staff to pursue leadership and advancement.

“When I moved to a new school, I had a principal with a lot of experience working with refugee and immigrant families. I hit it off with this principal because she understood families like mine, even though she was white. She was the first person who told me I could be a principal one day, and this was early in my career. This stuck with me.”

Mentorship also came up as an important factor in advancement and leadership success in the Division. Having mentors with a shared lived experience related to navigating leadership as a staff member of colour was described as beneficial. In addition, participants described the importance of getting feedback from mentors, being able to go to mentors with questions and learning from mentors who model advancement and effective leadership.

“Having some personal contact with someone in the position and who is prepared to support you and advocate for you is also important. It was with the support of a principal who got me on the path to receive a continuing contract. Having individuals like this is a must if you are going to have any kind of role. It definitely seems that one needs a mentor/godfather and developing some good relationships to give you a sense of what direction you can take and what you need to do.”

### Relationship building

Closely related to the importance of supportive leaders, mentors and colleagues, participants discussed how relationships and networks are helpful for advancement and leadership. Participants spoke about how participating in professional development and formal leadership and mentorship programs can help establish networks in the Division. Informal networking and relationship building was also discussed as an important factor for successfully advancing into leadership positions. Some of the challenges or barriers associated with the importance of networks is discussed later in the [Barriers](#) section of the report.

“Moving in the Division can be about who you know (the circles you can build and maintain). Means being honest and genuine with yourself. Knowing how to align yourself and be part of the team, part of the circle.”

## Leadership opportunities

Many responses from both aspiring and formal leaders gave examples of opportunities available to them in their work setting to demonstrate leadership. Many of these examples leveraged language skills, cultural knowledge via lived experience and/or a connection to the school community to share knowledge and further the work of anti-racism and equity in the Division.

“Set up a committee of teachers within the school to help students with anti-racism, bullying, things that students have to deal with in a school setting. Set up forums for students to share their opinions. Reporting tool. We are dealing with things that are Division wide, community wide, city wide that leaders need to deal with.”

## Professional Learning opportunities

Many participants cited the availability of PL opportunities for staff as a strength in the Division. Formal leaders, in particular, mentioned various initiatives that were helpful to their career journey, including the Leadership and Excellence in Assessment Program (LEAP), the new Teacher Induction Program, Leadership Saturdays, catchment PL for emerging leaders and PL offered via the Leadership Framework.

“Something that was helpful was the New Teacher Induction Program when I was just starting out. Watching the school closure process really taught me how important engaging and communicating with the community is. Being part of LEAP opened my eyes to the bigger Division picture. Collaborating with colleagues has been great learning. I get different ideas, and like having someone challenge my thinking and share different approaches.”

During the discussion, the effectiveness of PL opportunities was closely linked to the effectiveness of communications and other platforms used by the Division such as Connect to help staff find PL that best matched their career needs.

## Barriers

### Summary of Responses

Participants spoke about barriers to leadership and advancement they have experienced and witnessed in the Division. Aspiring leaders identified more barriers and spoke more frequently about barriers than formal leaders did. These conversations also surfaced, that this may be partly attributed to where each of the group of leaders are at in their leadership journeys. Overall, themes identified by aspiring leaders were consistent with those identified by formal leaders.

### Key Points

The main factors identified by participants as barriers to advancement and leadership included the following:

- Lack of transparency in hiring and advancement processes and lack of information about opportunities.
- Lack of diversity and representation in the organization, schools and leadership.
- Assumptions, stereotypes and tokenizing.
- Lack of support, recognition and encouragement from the Division and/or supervisors.
- Exclusivity in Division culture and networks.
- Speaking out and raising concerns.

## Discussion Highlights

### Lack of transparency and information

A lack of transparency related to advancement processes was a common theme raised by participants. There were two broad areas around advancement that were raised often:

1. The career and development pathways available within the Division.
2. A lack of constructive feedback or explanation when an individual is unsuccessful in a job competition.

For some respondents, the latter contributes to a perception that they were overlooked for a position.

Regarding a lack of transparency about career and development pathways within the Division, one participant described their experience as follows:

“...what steps, training, education are needed to advance to leadership roles in the Division. There is no clear training or development path for staff to follow in planning their career path.”

To clarify this, participants suggested that a page on Connect describing pathways to leadership, what positions exist on that pathway and clear criteria about what is required to achieve those positions would be helpful. Participants also suggested that this would contribute to equitable hiring practices by ensuring consistent criteria is used in the hiring process.

The perceived lack of transparency and a lack of feedback following unsuccessful applications for leadership positions contributed to participants’ feeling unsure of what was required of them to be successful in their attempts at achieving a leadership position. As described by a participant:

“There should be feedback sent after a job interview or job posting, if internal applicants did not get the position. This could help applicants prepare better for a position and/or know how to position themselves better and know what to apply for. “

The lack of transparency about qualifications required for positions also contributed to a number of participants expressing concern about bias and nepotism in the selection process.

“There is no formal process on the selection process for candidates to leadership roles at EPSB. Qualifications for the position are being tailored to the preferred candidate of the principal or head of the department. Sometimes promises are being made which should not be made thus hurting the objectivity of the hiring/selection process which greatly impacts staff morale and engagement. Hiring or selection is perceived as biased bordering on nepotism/cronyism.”

### Lack of diversity and representation

Aspiring and formal leaders spoke extensively about the lack of diversity and representation in staff across the Division. This includes a lack of diversity among the leadership within schools and central units. Participants felt this lack of diversity creates the impression that the Division does not recognize the benefits of having diverse staff and leaders. Participants also described how lack of diversity gives the impression that the Division may not value the expertise or skills of diverse staff, or that there are specific or intentional reasons why this lack of diversity exists.

“The current leaders of the Division have the ultimate power to hire, and the lack of diversity in Centre and most of the schools set-up, particularly in bigger schools and even the newly opened schools, clearly shows the current mind-set of leaders in the organization with regard to hiring people of colour, particularly in a leadership capacity.”

In addition, lack of diversity and representation was described as a barrier to leadership in that it can create an environment where diverse staff do not feel a sense of belonging.

“When there are very few voices advocating for a lot of people of colour, you don’t get far. We need to feel like we belong, cared for and are heard, but if you are always a lone voice in a big group, you're always in fight mode.”

### Assumptions and stereotypes

Participants described how assumptions and stereotypes have held them back from leadership advancement. This is one barrier that formal leaders identified more frequently than aspiring leaders. Participants spoke about assumptions being made about them based on their accent or languages they list on their resume; for example, that they are not strong English speakers or not capable of leadership in a larger school. In addition, several participants perceive that they may have been unsuccessful in getting interviews because of having a non-Anglicized name on their application.

“When I used my first name (ethnocultural) on applications when I was first looking for a job, I didn’t get any calls; when I Anglicized it, I started getting calls.”

Participants also discussed how stereotypes and assumptions about different aspects of their identities intersect. In particular, barriers to leadership for women of colour, individuals who are or appear young and individuals who are gender or sexually diverse were discussed by participants. Concerns about being overlooked for leadership positions based on these identity factors were described by participants as reinforced by the lack of diversity in leadership; for example, some respondents were under the impression that most principals in the Division are white men.

“In general, my age and being a female is a barrier - male dominated so I feel like my voice is not heard the same way or given the same weight even if I am saying the same thing as a male colleague.”

There was also discussion about how assumptions and stereotypes have resulted in situations where staff who are Black, Indigenous or a Person of Colour perceive that they are being tokenized or pigeonholed in their roles. This includes assumptions that an individual represents an entire culture or they are being asked to participate in activities to show diversity in the Division. Some also spoke about not being sure whether they were included in opportunities based on their skills or as a token. Some participants also noted that, although it can be a positive experience to be recognized for unique skills, for example language skills, this can also limit opportunities to access broader leadership roles and opportunities.

“From conversations with my colleagues, many of these issues are related to tokenization and being put into a box. Some people take this on proudly, but others feel pigeon holed or stereotyped.”

## Lack of support, recognition and encouragement

The lack of support, recognition and encouragement was identified as a barrier for participants and was more prevalent amongst aspiring leaders than formal leaders. Participants frequently spoke about the feeling that staff who are Black, Indigenous or a Person of Colour have to work harder to prove themselves as worthy to move into leadership. At times, even with this extra work, these individuals were still not able to secure leadership roles. Participants gave examples of acting in leadership positions and fulfilling informal leadership roles and then not being recognized, trusted or encouraged to formally move into these roles. In addition, participants told stories of how their educational credentials from other countries have not been recognized or valued.

“If you don’t have the right person supporting you to be in a formal leadership position, you remain unknown.”

In addition, several participants spoke about feeling that the unique or specific skills they have are not appreciated or considered in advancement decisions. These skills and strengths include but are not limited to, the ability to build connections, trust and relationships with diverse students and families, the ability to communicate and teach in a range of languages and the ability to represent diverse perspectives and experiences within the Division.

“What has prevented me is that I haven’t been utilized in the way I think I would be most effective. For example, we had a project in my unit to engage with members of southeast Edmonton (i.e., where there is a large South Asian community). I felt this was a great opportunity for me to take a leadership role and show my skill set because I am of Southeast Asian descent and can speak the language. I asked the leadership in my unit if I could take a more prominent role in this engagement, and they said they would take it into consideration. On the day of, however, I was only tasked to be a translator.”

## Exclusivity in Division culture and networks

Many aspiring leaders spoke about how the Division has a culture that often relies on networks, relationships, and, as described by some participants, “cronyism” for advancement and leadership success. It is notable that this theme was significantly less prominent among formal leaders compared to aspiring leaders. In contrast, support, encouragement, relationships, networks and mentorship were some of the major factors that formal leaders described as supporting their advancement and leadership in the Division. There is a perception among some aspiring leaders that only staff with the right networks or relationships are encouraged to pursue leadership opportunities.

“A lot of talk and observation going around that advancement to leadership roles in the Division is based on connections not actual qualifications, which is very discouraging. There is a perception of nepotism and cronyism in getting opportunities for career advancements in the Division.”

Participants reported that not knowing the right people or having the right connections can result in a lack of encouragement and support to pursue leadership roles. Some aspiring leaders describe the Division as “gatekeeping” access to advancement and leadership positions.

“People who are in leadership positions, how did they do it? Would be interested to know. A lot of time Principals and AP’s hire who they know or already have someone in mind when they post a job. Very frustrating.”

## Speaking out

Some participants reported that speaking out or raising concerns can be a barrier to leadership. This was discussed particularly in relation to raising concerns related to racism and inequity. Participants voiced fears of appearing disruptive, difficult to work with or being stereotyped as a person who frequently complains. There was concern that being outspoken would tarnish a staff member's reputation and make it more difficult to be successful in advancement and leadership opportunities.

"The stereotype of the person of colour complaining scares me a lot. I've brought things up before multiple times, and have had to explain why it is racist... You don't want to be the complainer because they might not want you around. But it feels like you have to speak up because you're the only person of colour in the room."

## Ways to Improve

### Summary of Responses

Aspiring and formal leaders offered similar suggestions as to ways the Division could improve and increase diversity within leadership positions. It should be noted that some of the respondent's suggestions for improvement may already be enacted or are in the process of being planned and/or implemented, such as work to examine and revise hiring practices for teachers and adjustments to the Division's Leadership Development Framework to include content that supports anti-racism, reconciliation and equity.

#### Key Points

- Continue conversations and commit to sharing and next steps.
- Offer supports lead by individuals who have lived experiences or represent diverse segments of the population.
- Re-examine leadership qualifications, requirements and hiring processes.
- Create career planning and transition processes that help target diverse candidates.

### Discussion Highlights

#### Continue conversations and commit to sharing and next steps

As seen with many of the engagement sessions sparked by the Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan there was a strong appreciation for having open, honest, respectful and sincere conversations about uncomfortable topics. While these conversations are important, participants expressed that they wanted these opportunities to be more widespread, accessible and inclusive—potentially spanning all stakeholders in the Division. Many participants also stressed the importance of having the findings of the FGD shared back with them and having these communications outline clear and tangible actions or next steps within reasonable timeframes.

"Looking forward that these conversations will lead to the creation of policies and initiatives that would provide an appropriate amount of representation of communities of colour in leadership roles in EPSB."

#### Offer supports lead by individuals that have lived experiences or represent diverse segments of the population

Participants expressed the desire to have various types of support including professional learning sessions, networking events, peer coaching and mentorship programs that could support diverse staff seeking leadership roles. These supports would be led by individuals with lived experiences or represent diverse segments of the population (e.g., people of colour, women) and provide opportunities to share experiences, challenges, advice, as well as create support networks and collaborative partnerships. Ideally, participants felt that the provision of these supports should be done

systematically and start early in one's career with the Division so that the onus did not fall on the individual to navigate pathways to becoming a leader.

Participants also suggested there be dedicated individuals at various levels in the Division (i.e., centrally, catchment-level, school-level) that have the expertise to support initiatives related to anti-racism and equity.

### Re-examine leadership qualifications, requirements, and hiring processes

Participants recognized that the Division set out specific qualifications required of individuals in leadership positions (i.e., Master's degree, completion of courses, etc.), but questioned why some of these qualifications were needed and requested greater transparency around how these qualifications informed the hiring process.

Participants also suggested critically re-examining leadership qualifications and reviewing hiring practices so that they better reflect the needs of the student populations. Some suggestions included:

- Modify/Adapt leadership job descriptions and positions so that they reflect the needs of the staff and student populations. This may include language proficiency as a component of hiring practices.
- Collect staff demographics on job applications “for the purpose of culturally responsive hiring processes.” This collection would also enable the Division to reflect on whether there were improvements being made to increase staff diversity in leadership positions within the Division.

“I wonder if the Division doesn't ask about backgrounds in fear of sounding racist or segregating people off. But my lived experience is a huge asset to work with families with similar experiences/backgrounds. I believe we need to appreciate differences and find commonalities.”

### Create career planning and transition processes that help target diverse candidates

A number of participants suggested that the Division build partnerships with post-secondary institutions to build career planning or transition processes that target new graduates with diverse backgrounds. Participants also felt this outreach could also extend to Division students through summer programs or guest talks to encourage Black, Indigenous or students of colour to consider teaching as a career pathway.

## CONCLUSIONS

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The staff engagement initiative described in this report led to powerful conversations that brought together perspectives of many diverse leaders and aspiring leaders in the Division, and provided feedback to inform actions that can be taken by the Division to support increased diversity across leadership positions. Participants relayed their experiences related to leadership within the organization, highlighting barriers encountered and successes achieved, while suggesting possible ways forward in an anti-racist mode. Although careful planning was made to create a welcoming and safe space in the FGDs, sharing lived experiences of racism proved difficult for some participants and discussion group facilitators. Feedback regarding the FGDs also stressed the importance for concrete, impactful action resulting from this round of engagement and from the 2021-2022 Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan in general. Many expressed a willingness to be involved in future dialogue and appreciated the opportunity to have staff who are Black, Indigenous or a Person of Colour from across the Division come together to work toward positive change. Participants noted that such a gathering was unprecedented in their professional experience in the Division and saw potential for further networking and mentoring possibilities.

Based on the feedback from these staff conversations, the following areas of focus merit further consideration to strengthen the Division's commitment to anti-racism and equity efforts:

- Processes that support safe spaces to report and discuss incidents of racism in the workplace.
- Increased access to and information about PL opportunities that support leadership readiness and cultivate professional networks throughout the Division for staff who identify as Black, Indigenous or a Person of Colour.
- Increased access to and communication about PL for all Division staff that promotes anti-racism and equity.
- Increased transparency regarding job postings, job applications and hiring practices.
- Further collaboration with community partners to promote the hiring of candidates with diverse backgrounds.
- Opportunities to build strong networks of diverse staff throughout the organization.
- Consistent communication and engagement with staff to further the goals of the 2021-2022 Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan.

## RESOURCES

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“Board Statement on Anti-racism and Inclusion”, (2020, June 4). *Edmonton Public Schools*.

<https://epsb.ca/news/boardoftrustees/newsitemboardstatementonanti-racism.html>

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<https://www.epsb.ca/media/epsb/ourdistrict/boardoftrustees/boardmeetings/2020-21/september222020/ApprovedBoardMinutes-September22,2020.pdf>

Edmonton Public Schools. (2021, June 22). Anti-racism and Equity HAAB.BP.

<https://epsb.ca/ourdistrict/policy/h/haabbpanti-racismandequity/>

Edmonton Public Schools. (2021, November 5). Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan.

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xR2D1CPZdGeY\\_rN3lWxfS8JPvYIKmdFR/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xR2D1CPZdGeY_rN3lWxfS8JPvYIKmdFR/view)

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