

Tuesday, September 8, 2009  
**Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's Initiatives**  
**Regarding**  
**Students and Poverty**  
 Judith Bishop

This document provides an overview of the different approaches being undertaken within Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board with regards to students living in poverty.

There are students living in poverty throughout the district, although they are concentrated in the lower city. The HWDSB is fully aware that students living in poverty are at higher risk of failure than other students

*The gap in school performance (by socio-economic status) grows dramatically by Grade 3, and is startling by Grade 12. At this age, children in low SES groups are dropping out of school and failing grades at rates almost five times (higher) than those of their higher SES peers."* p.96 Early Years Study 2

To prevent students from failing a variety of strategies is needed including: an emphasis on instruction, effective programs and increased expectations for student success; explicit values and commitment as expressed in the Anti-Classism guidelines of the Equity Policy; targeted work on those schools with a concentration of students from low socio-economic backgrounds; building relationships with students; partnerships with other agencies and organisations; and collaboration with initiatives to combat poverty.

### **Instructional Focus**

Good education provides an important route for students to lift themselves out of a life of poverty by opening up greater opportunities for employment and allowing the students to show their potential. So the most important task of a board of education is to see that all students achieve their potential, and graduate from high school. Without a graduating diploma, students' choices of employment and their potential to earn are reduced. "Our students need safety, respect and high expectations," Jeff Heil says. "They don't need charity, but opportunity" (from a 2006 USA report on three schools successful in educating disadvantaged students.)

The Board of Trustees has approved Strategic Directions which include that 85% of all students will graduate by 2009. In its 2007 Guide to the Appraisal of the Director, trustees have articulated their expectations for improvement in students' outcomes across several measures. Here are some of the Quality Indicators in the document:

- The outcomes from School Improvement Plans demonstrate an improvement in literacy and numeracy in 2007
- EQAO results reported in 2007 exceed those in 2006
- EQAO results for ESL students reported in 2007 exceed those for 2006
- Retention rates for HWDSB for 2007 are higher than those in 2006
- EQAO scores for Special Education students reported in 2007 exceed those in 2006
- The gap between boys' and girls' achievement in the EQAO results

declines

- Students enrolled in OYAP in 2007 exceed those in 2006
- More students successfully complete school to work programs
- The gap between high achieving and low achieving schools decreases, with low achieving schools improving their scores, and high achieving schools maintaining or improving their scores
- Identified high and moderate needs schools increase their scores in all EQAO tests

These expectations are reflected in all school improvement plans, and are monitored by Superintendents of Schools and consultants. Regular reports are provided to trustees.

Targeted services for students at particular risk are provided:

There are different programs offered: There are two vocational schools, 3 elementary and 4 secondary alternative education programs, in addition to the in-school alternative programs offered by high schools. There is a SALEP centre for students who have school attendance problems and many of these students re-engage with school after completing the program.

For aboriginal students, there are counsellors, a program at Sir John A. Macdonald High School and a teacher for the alternative program at the Native Indian centre.

There are about 45 teachers in community agencies for high risk students through the HWDSB's Section 23 programs including such agencies as Woodview, Hats Off, The Hamilton-Wentworth Correctional Centre, and Grace Haven. The latter two programs always produce graduating students.

Programs for drop-outs from school include an Adult Day school and other programs for students who need help to achieve their diploma. The Turning Point program helps re-engage students who have dropped out who have 20+ credits. A new program, for which we just received funding, called N-Gage, will begin in September. It is for 16/17 year olds with few credits who have dropped out or are disengaged from school.

There are credit recovery programs and work experience programs. There has been increased development of pathways and specialized high-skills major programs such as Hospitality/Tourism - Delta, Parkview, and Health/Wellness - Sir Winston Churchill, Delta.

Extra support in literacy and numeracy is provided in summer camps for senior elementary students, and students about to enter Grade 9.

The Assessment Centre provides educational advice and direction for those who are new to Canada, and those who need a graduating diploma. Forty-two specialist English Language Learner teachers support immigrant children in elementary schools, and a large number of specialist English -as-a-second language programs are provided in some high schools.

Programs recognizing the special needs of boys have been implemented: Boys to Men is a leadership program, boys reading clubs are aimed at improving literacy, and there is an elementary school offering boys only classes.

Finally the aims of all these programs are promoted in the Hoops for Hope program led by the Director which combines basketball, fundraising for charitable concerns in Hamilton and overseas, and a discussion of poverty and its effects.

### **Equity Policy**

Policies embody the values of the Board of Education. Implicit in the Guidelines for Anti-Classism in the Board's Equity Policy are the Board's expectations that all students can achieve regardless of their socio-economic background, and that low expectations of academic success for these students are not acceptable. The policy also acknowledges that equality and equity are not the same, and that some schools need additional resources to support students:

HWDSB Equity Policy (approved November, 2005):

1.4 The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board will continue to acknowledge the needs addressed by the Compensatory Education program and that:

- Not all school communities are equal in their ability to support their students
- Schools can make a difference in overcoming the education effects of a disadvantaged community
- Senior and School Administration are to be encouraged and supported in their efforts to provide additional support and consideration to identified schools.

10.4 The Hamilton-Wentworth District school Board will provide additional, focussed staff development in schools that have been identified as having specific needs based on the socio-economic demographics of its catchment area.

Unfortunately low expectations of students who come from disadvantaged homes have become part of the culture of some schools. The teaching emphasis may be on rote learning and monotonous make-work projects. More in-service and leadership is needed to change this culture if students are to receive the kind of rigorous education they deserve and the success they need. This spring principals heard the message from Alan Blankstein from the Hope Institute that academic failure for students is not acceptable. Schools have to work harder to provide the right kind of instruction and teaching that supports successful student learning.

A large focus continues to be on staff development. Literacy Improvement teachers support other teachers in schools. Principals and superintendents have been bringing in-service to schools, and schools have been encouraged to support teams of teachers working together to develop new approaches to student learning. An Equity Institute for staff is scheduled at the end of the summer. Other work on this topic is planned

### **Compensatory Schools Committee and Plan**

The former Hamilton Board in the 1970s recognized a series of schools where there are concentrations of students with high needs. These schools are now identified through a process that involves an annual review of neighbourhood data for poverty, schools' student mobility rates and parent's education rates. Those schools with the highest scores are labelled High and Moderate Needs Schools or Compensatory Schools and are targeted for special review and support.

In 2006 a new Compensatory School Report and Plan were approved by trustees. This has resulted in the continued extra provision of some teachers for junior and senior elementary grades, for special educational assistants to work with students with behaviour difficulties in middle school grades, and for additional speech and language support services. A superintendent has been given Compensatory schools as a responsibility. All these schools have had literacy improvement teachers for about three years and they are being used as part of an increased staff development focus in high needs schools.

At the secondary level, professional development has focussed on re-engaging early school leavers, Student Success programs and career pathways.

An Anti-poverty Task Force, a part of the Compensatory Schools Committee, has been set up to deal with nutrition, accessibility and clothing closet issues.

All high needs schools have a nutrition program operating in their schools or in a nearby neighbourhood facility. Sometimes these do not operate every day, and the quantity and quality of the food being offered could be enhanced. The aim is to provide further support to schools in this area.

Accessibility issues are broad. For example, students may not be able to afford to play certain sports, or take all subjects, as the extra cost of equipment needed is beyond the families' resources. In addition, because transportation is an issue, students may not be able to take advantage of work experience and some other programs, as they cannot get to them.

Clothing closets aim to provide good quality clothing for students for a variety of purposes including appropriate clothing for co-operative work experiences.

### **Partnerships**

HWDSB is receptive to working with others. It provides public access to its playgrounds and playing fields in the summer without charge. It has an arrangement with the City to provide 16,000 free hours of gym space for community use. It is building new schools with spacious gyms and child care centres to enable schools to be community hubs. Its Partnership Policy provides the expectations for board and partner relations. It also needs community support if it is to be successful with at-risk students.

Long established partners, such as Public Health, the Public Library, SISO, Umbrella Family and Child Centres, YMCA, YWCA, Today's Family, Partners in Nutrition, the Police, Ontario Early Years Centres, Hamilton Community Foundation, John Howard Society, Alternatives for Youth, Dawn Patrol, Banyan, the Boys and Girls Kiwanis club and Rotary clubs, provide valuable services which augment those that HWDSB can provide. The energetic HWDSB Partnerships and Innovation Office has forged new partnerships with other agencies, businesses and organisations that provide mentors, additional resources to schools and students, and additional services such as camps, and after-school programs. Many of the Compensatory Schools also have a large variety of additional partners, and these partnerships are growing such as Hess's partnership with the Spectator, and Mohawk College's link to the Keith neighbourhood which includes children going to Bennetto, Cathy Wever and Sir John A. Macdonald.

The partnerships are resulting in after-school programs in most high needs schools. This summer has seen more summer programs and camps in schools than ever before. Generous donations from individuals are providing post graduate education funding for students, and supporting Arts education including financial support for students who are part of HWDSB's string music program.

### **Community Initiatives**

Some children come to school already at a disadvantage as they are not as ready to learn as those from more affluent neighbourhoods. So early-learning programs and support for parents are crucial tools to help the school system better do its job of teaching students. The Best Start pilot in the lower east end of Hamilton is important as it provides a free half-day program for pre-school children, child-care and support services for parents in 8 schools. There are also Ontario Early Years programs in many other schools. The school board is well represented on the Best Start Network and works closely with community and City partners to make this a success. The addition of four parents' centres to

Bennetto, Stinson, Lake Avenue and Memorial schools, funded by the Ministry of Education and opening this fall, are important new supports.

The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board is a member of another important community initiative to combat and understand poverty: the Hamilton Round Table on Poverty with its goal of making Hamilton the best place to raise a child. There are also connections with an embryo group at McMaster University, where staff there are moving towards a closer active understanding and relationship with poverty issues in this community, and the Understanding the Early Years (UEY) federal project which in Hamilton has a poverty focus.

HWDSB is a member of the Canadian Inner City Schools Council. At the recent conference there were Workshop presentations by Joanne McIntosh (Stinson Street School) and Sue Dunlop (Roxborough Park School).