

MEMORANDUM

DATE: 1 May 2006

TO: Dr Chris Spence – Director of Education

FROM: Anti-Poverty Task Force

SUBJECT: Recommendations to alleviate poverty in the HWDSB

BACKGROUND

The Anti-Poverty Task Force was created in October 2005 by Dr Chris Spence to respond to the needs of the students of the HWDSB who live in poverty. The Task Force was co-chaired by Principal Scott Sincerbox (Elementary) and Principal Mike Rehill (Secondary). The Task Force has met six times to examine the needs and collaborate on recommendations to alleviate the effects of poverty on HWDSB students. The Task Force believes:

- Schools can make a difference in overcoming the effects of poverty on students in disadvantaged communities;
- The school community has the capacity to support the needs of disadvantaged students;
- The key to success is total involvement of all stakeholders;
- There are schools where students with needs are concentrated, although there are students in need in most schools; and
- All students deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and in accordance with the HWDSB's Equity Policy.

Ultimately, the Task Force believes that we can break the cycle of poverty in Hamilton by ensuring that all HWDSB students have the opportunity to complete their High School Diplomas.

STATISTICS

(Source: Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction)

- Almost 20% of Hamilton's population (95,650 residents) live in poverty
- 41% of those living in poverty are too young or too old to work
- 80% of female-led, single parent families live in poverty
- Children, age 0 to 14 account for 24% of the poor
- 44% of Aboriginals live in poverty
- 52% of recent immigrants live in poverty
- In some schools' catchment areas the incidence of poverty can be as high as 64%

HIGH NEEDS SCHOOLS

The HWDSB Learning Opportunities Plan – Weighted Rankings May 2005, rates the following schools as High Needs Schools:

Secondary

- Sir John A. Macdonald
- Delta
- Parkview
- Mountain

Elementary

- Dr J. Edgar Davey – North End
- Hess Street – North End
- Gibson – North End
- Queen Victoria – North End
- Sanford Avenue – North End
- Lake Avenue – East End
- Roxborough Park – East End
- Prince of Wales – North End
- Stinson Street - North End
- Bennetto – North End
- Hillsdale – East End
- King George - North End
- Parkdale - East End
- Sir Wilfrid Laurier – East End

AREAS OF FOCUS

The Task force is concerned about the sustainability of any initiatives to combat poverty. Presently, to address student anti-poverty issues there are several, mostly unco-ordinated, school-centred, and principal-driven projects; all have little system support. Principals cannot be expected to be the instigators of projects as well as the fundraisers for them. A sustainable system –wide imitative must have some system co-ordination and fund raising strategies. Although the Task Force identifies the targets for system fundraising, and makes some suggestions about how these might be achieved, it believes only if HWDSB addresses the need to resource a position with responsibility for system fundraising will the Anti Poverty initiative be successful. This position would have the necessary time and skill to develop, cultivate, research and promote fund raising to the public.

To enable more students to graduate, the Task Force identified some key immediate priorities. Special Programs (literacy, after-school, anti-bullying, drug awareness) and Special Staffing (teachers, EAs, Social Workers, Special Ed support) are important and these items are being covered through the Compensatory Schools Action Plan. Community Policing and Safety are necessary but are in the Portfolio of the Safe Schools SO. This leaves three key priority areas not attached to any ongoing work within HWDSB:

~~The Task Force has decided on the following three priority items:~~

- Nutrition;
- Clothing and essentials to succeed (Walk-In Closet);
- Accessibility Issues (Transportation, Extra Curricular Activities etc);

Nutrition:

Students who experience hunger are three times as likely to have concentration problems, four times as likely to suffer from fatigue, three times as likely to suffer form irritability, twelve times as likely to report dizziness and twice as likely to have frequent headaches (Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project: a Survey of Childhood hunger in the United States, 1991)

The Anti-Poverty Task Force created and administered a needs assessment of all HWDSB schools to determine the extent of nutrition programs in the Board. Although the survey showed that many schools have some sort of nutrition program (including all of the high needs schools) it is unclear if the present level of nutrition provision is adequate and the needs of students with high needs (e.g. students on welfare) are being met. The present programs are school based and have no system support. More work is needed to co-ordinate existing funds, develop models and extend programming

The Walk-In Closet. Students living in poverty need appropriate clothing for inclement weather. They also require clothing for school such as physical education, and co-operative education placements. The concept of the walk-in closet was developed at SJAM in October 2003. It was developed in order to provide to students living on their own and/or in dire economic circumstances. Other schools soon followed:

- Mountain S.S. 2004
- Delta S.S. 2005
- Prince of Wales 2005
- Westdale S.S. 2005
- Sanford Ave. 2006
- Sir Winston Churchill 2006
- Parkview S.S. 2006

The Closet provides gently worn clothing, winter coats, boots, mittens, new socks and underwear, toiletry essentials and canned/non-perishable food.

Accessibility Issues: It is widely recognized that one of the most formidable challenges facing the poor is the inability to pay for the “extras” that other students take for granted as part of their school experience. Many of our schools charge student fees or athletic fees. These demands on low-income households usually lead to their children feeling excluded and alienated from schools.

Finally the Task Force recognised that there needed to be a Steering Committee to co-ordinate the work of these committees, and explore other avenues for improving the situation of students living in poverty who attend HWDSB schools.

CONCLUSIONS

The Board needs a fund raising position for board initiatives such as Anti-Poverty.

The Board needs to form an Anti-Poverty Steering Committee to coordinate the efforts aimed at this initiative.

The Board needs to form a System Nutrition Committee, System Walk-In Closet Committee and System Accessibility Committee.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That HWDSB create and resource a central fundraising position ~~within the HWDSB.~~
2. Continue the Anti-Poverty Steering Committee (add Supervisory Officer, Immigrant and Aboriginal rep, Chairs of Nutrition, Walk-In Closet and Accessibility Committees and other members as required) in order to:
 1. Coordinate the system Nutrition, Walk-In Closet, Accessibility and Community Policing committees;
 2. Set-up and administer an Anti-Poverty Task Force Fund to support present and future anti-poverty initiatives;
 3. Oversee the equitable distribution of all cash and corporate donations;
 4. Research, catalogue, assess and allocate all existing available funding;
 5. Strive to design and implement district wide anti-poverty programs that are sustainable and independent of changes in school leadership;
 6. Implement an “Adopt-a-School” program with the Private and public sector (as well as churches) that matches every school up with at least one partner in education;
 7. Design and implement a Board Anti-Poverty Task Force web page where anyone can make donations;

8. Identify other needs as they arise;
9. Research models, policies and processes that are successful in other jurisdictions;
10. Explore the concept of having HWDSB staff contribute to the Anti-Poverty fund;
11. Match “have” and “have not” schools;
12. Review each year’s work, develop an annual plan and report to the Board of Trustees.
13. Explore the unique needs of individual populations such as those living away from home on student welfare, aboriginal students, and government-assisted refugees.

The work of the Steering Committee will be co-ordinated with the Compensatory School Action Plan, and the Safe Schools Committee, and link to Hamilton’s Anti-Poverty Task Force,

3. Establish 3 sub-committees for Nutrition, Walk-In Closet, and Accessibility with mandates to do hands-on work.

Mandate of the NUTRITION Sub-Committee

Formation of a system wide Nutrition Committee with representatives from participating schools, central office, Public Health, Plant Services as well as the community with a mandate to:

1. Use the Board Nutrition Policy in order to provide guidance and assistance to schools that are concerned with providing nutrition to students; fully realizing that there are high needs students *in every school*.
2. Develop several “models” of how nutrition can be provided in different types of schools and provide advice and assistance to schools that wish to establish nutrition programs.
3. Establish a system partnership with *Breakfast for Learning* and *Partners in Nutrition*.
4. Oversee the equitable distribution of cash and in-kind donations of food.
5. Develop strategy and Action Plans for supporting students in the system, developing community partnership and resources and soliciting the public and private sector for support.
6. Explore models of Nutrition delivery in other jurisdictions
7. Identify opportunities for new programs including the use of kitchens in new schools and Best Start programs.

Mandate of the WALK- IN-CLOSET sub-committee

Formation of a system wide Walk In Closet Committee with Reps from participating schools, Central Office, Accommodation and Planning as well as the community with a mandate to:

1. Establish a “model” Walk In Closet in order to assist other schools in establishing closets;
2. Provide advice and assistance to schools that wish to establish Closets;
3. Provide an Outreach program for schools with isolated instances of need;
4. Oversee the equitable distribution of large donations of toiletries, clothes, or food;
5. Develop strategy and action plans for supporting students in the system, developing community partnership and resources and soliciting the public and private sector for support; and
6. Ensure that the Board’s logistic resources can and will be used in support of the initiative.

Mandate of the Accessibility sub-committee

Formation of a system-wide Accessibility Committee with representatives from participating schools, central office, as well as the community with a mandate to:

1. Ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to the same kinds of elementary and high school experiences, such as trips, extra-curricular activities, and participation in sports;
2. Ensure that a student’s lack of transportation funding is not a barrier to access to programs;
3. Ensure that all instructional programs are equally accessible to all students;

4. Consider strategies to level the playing field for students living in poverty (such as mentors, incentives, etc.) to enable their success in school programs;
5. Develop strategy and action plans for supporting students in the system, developing community partnership and resources and soliciting the public and private sector for support; and
6. Consider extending and marketing the concept of the Memorial Bursary as one tool to address accessibility issues within HWDSB schools.

COMPOSITION OF THE TASK FORCE STEERING COMMITTEE

- Mike Rehill and Scott Sincerbox - Co-Chairs
- Dr Chris Spence – Ex-Officio
- Linda Lopinski – HWDSB Partnership and Innovation Officer
- Jackie Penman – HWDSB Corporate Communications
- Judith Bishop – Trustee Ward 2

COMPOSITION OF THE TASK FORCE

- **The Steering Committee**
- Wanda Shelswell – Secondary VP
- Paul Barwinski – Secondary VP
- Katie Carr – Elementary VP
- Sue Dunlop – Elementary VP
- Pam Nielsen – Supervisor Client Services
- Jennifer Powell-Fralick Childcare Program Leader
- Susann Speakman-Carlash – SJAM Walk-In Closet
- Kleri Venizelos-Warren – Westdale Walk-In Closet
- John Elston – SST SJAM
- Jan Lukas – Community Rep
- Cheryl Paterson – Community Rep
- Alex Moroz – Rotary Club of Hamilton
- Mary Ellen Prange – Partners in Nutrition

APPENDICES

- Appendix One – Compensatory Schools Action Plan
- Appendix Two – High School Nutrition Survey
- Appendix Three – Elementary School Nutrition Survey

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