

HWDSB

Media Release

For Immediate Release

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board Trustees Appoint Independent Specialized Panel to Lead Safe Schools Review Panel on Bullying

Hamilton, Ontario – November 12, 2019: Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) has appointed an independent and specialized team with diverse backgrounds and significant experience in children’s health and well-being, child psychology and research, and an understanding of school board operations, to lead the work of the Safe Schools: Bullying Prevention & Intervention Review Panel.

The Review Panel includes three respected community members and an independent consulting firm supported by four advisors and experts in bullying, mental health, and special education. This follows the Board Trustee approval of a staff report that called for the formation of the review panel at its board meeting on October 28. The review panel will provide the Director of Education, Manny Figueiredo, with independent feedback and recommendations on how to prevent, intervene, report and respond to bullying. The resulting report is expected in May 2020 and will be shared with the Board of Trustees and made public.

“We take the safety and well-being of our students and staff seriously and know that, as the Board of Trustees, we can always do more to help improve the communities where we live and work,” said Alex Johnstone, Chair of the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board. “The review panel will provide us with guidance and advice on bullying prevention strategies and tactics, so that we have the best practices and tools to make our students and staff feel safe, supported and accepted.”

The members of the review panel were named by Trustees at the November 12 board meeting, and will consist of the following respected community members who, combined have several decades of experience, knowledge and skills:

Dr. Jean Clinton, a Clinical Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences in the division of Child Psychiatry at McMaster, is renowned nationally and internationally as an advocate for children’s issues. She has been a consultant to children and youth mental health programs, child welfare, and primary care for more than 30 years. She was education advisor to the Premier of Ontario and the Minister of Education from 2014 – 2018. She has lived and worked in Hamilton since 1965.

Brenda Flaherty, former Executive Vice President and COO at Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS), and currently Assistant Professor at McMaster University’s School of Nursing, has extensive board experience for a variety of health, community development and well-being organizations like the YMCA Canada, the Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford YMCA, the North Hamilton Community Health Centre, and The Change Foundation. Ms. Flaherty led the development of the ground-breaking “Live Well” partnership between the YMCA, HHS and McMaster University, which links acute care hospital health services with community health and wellness programs. She was born and raised and currently lives in Hamilton.

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Dr. Gary Warner, a former professor and administrator at McMaster University, is an award winning, dedicated and respected member of the Hamilton community with more than 45 years of experience with issues related to international development, peace, poverty, human rights, antiracism, immigration and social justice. Dr. Warner has worked at or been on the board of several organizations, including Chair of the Working Committee of Strengthening Hamilton Community Initiative, member of the Governing Council of the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion, the Steering Committee of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, and the Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council.

The review panel will have access to independent advisors and experts, including:

- **Barry Finlay**, former Director of Special Education for the Province of Ontario;
- **Dr. Debra J. Pepler**, a distinguished Research Professor of Psychology at York University;
- **Dr. Kathy Short**, a Clinical Child Psychologist and Executive Director for School Mental Health Ontario; and
- **Dr. Tracy Vaillancourt**, a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in School-Based Mental Health and Violence Prevention at the University of Ottawa.

The team will also be supported by the KOJO Institute, a leading consultancy with subject matter experts in equity and human rights, anti-racism and organizational culture change, among others. Principal Consultant **Kike Ojo-Thompson** is currently designing and executing an organizational framework across North America that addresses challenges in equity, human rights, diversity and corporate culture. The KOJO Institute has advised several organizations including the Toronto District School Board, Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies and United Way.

Additionally, the HWDSB's Policy Committee reviewed amendments to the [Code of Conduct Policy](#) last school year, and will be reviewing two additional safe school policies this year: Bullying Prevention and Intervention, as well as Student Behaviour and Discipline.

Find the full report highlighting the Safe Schools: Bullying Prevention & Intervention Review Panel online at www.hwdsb.on.ca/about/trustees/meetings

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