

# HWDSB

Equity and Well-being



## Safe Schools Action Plan



**2021-2023**

# Mission

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We empower students to learn and grow to their full potential in a diverse world.

# Commitment

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We are committed to learning, equity, engagement and innovation.



Note: Some photos were taken before enhanced public health measures for COVID-19.

# Overview

To address bullying, HWDSB is committed to responding to the voices of students, parents/guardians/caregivers, staff and community as shared within the Safe Schools: Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel's final report, [Building Healthy Relationships and an Inclusive, Caring Learning Environment](#).

This means:

- a relentless focus on building positive and inclusive cultures in all classrooms and schools – a place where everyone belongs, everyone is safe and everyone achieves;
- creating learning environments where student identity and voice are centered – students' lived experiences are honoured and an essential part of learning;
- relationships are positive, supportive, caring and kind;
- creating structures to gather, listen and respond to student voice – student voice must inform school and board plans;
- safety is paramount and incidents of bullying are addressed with active involvement of students and families – this includes the student who experiences bullying, the student who displays bullying behavior and the student who witnesses bullying.

We will do this by:

- being transparent and sharing regular updates with students, parents/guardians/caregivers, staff and community;
- creating structures to ensure student, parent/guardian/caregiver, staff and community voice inform school and board plans and that these plans are publicly shared and reported on;
- improved engagement with attention to working with those impacted by decisions;
- building relationships and trust through our actions – listening and responding and;
- being accountable at the school and system-level for improvement in student safety and well-being.

This abridged Safe Schools Action Plan provides an overview of the recommendations and actions essential to transform the cultures within our schools.

## Recommendation #1:

**Increase student ownership and seek out and listen to student voices.**

1. Involve students in the co-creation, implementation and evaluation of all HWDSB bullying prevention and intervention activities and initiatives at the school-level and system level, including reviewing and updating related policies and procedures.
2. Build on HWDSB's current expertise with student voice initiatives by establishing regular and consistent mechanisms for capturing student voices on the subjects of bullying and school climate. Both school and system levels and use a range of accessible and interactive methods, with School Climate Survey being only one example.
3. Ensure student voices are sought out and incorporated into the school's response to incidents of bullying.
4. Include student voice and student-centred bullying metrics, such as bullying prevalence, descriptors of students who are being bullied, school belonging, and caring adult, in HWDSB's performance monitoring framework.
5. Share student voice data with full school community, including parents, guardians, caregivers and community partners. In keeping with the principles put forth in the Culturally Responsible and Relevant Pedagogy framework, demonstrate how student voices are used to inform school improvement processes and plans using clear, relatable examples.
6. Within the context of a whole-school approach, develop interactive resources with students that provide students with concrete examples and scripts for being an ally or bullying upstander.
7. Have students from Grades 4-12 participate as leaders on existing school improvement teams.
8. Ensure all student-led activities and processes are implemented with appropriate adult allyship.
9. When engaging students, consider and include the perspectives and experiences of the student experiencing bullying, the student with bullying behaviours and the student who witnesses.
10. Ensure action steps are aligned with and included in the Equity Action Plan as well as other appropriate student well-being initiatives, such as Mental Health Strategy and Indigenous Education and Indigenous Cultural Safety.
11. Students to play a central role in developing and implementing all of the review panel's recommended action steps.



# PARENTS, GUARDIANS, CAREGIVERS

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## Recommendation #2:

Involve parents, guardians and caregivers in bullying prevention and response in meaningful ways.

1. Share available educational resources on bullying with all parents, guardians and caregivers, including information on the types of bullying (including cyberbullying); the difference between bullying, aggression and teasing; impact of bullying; specific examples of how to respond to bullying; and what they can do if their child bullies.
2. Share new and emerging educational resources on cyberbullying with parents, guardians and caregivers as they become available over the coming months.
3. Involve parents, guardians and caregivers in the co-creation, implementation and evaluation of bullying prevention and intervention activities and initiatives as outlined under Recommendation #3 and #4.
4. Establish ongoing, representative and accessible mechanisms for seeking parent input and feedback on bullying prevention and intervention initiatives and activities at both the school and system levels.
5. Expand the ways parents, guardians and caregivers can get involved within HWDSB (such as school councils, PIC and Indigenous Education Councils) to participate in the development, implementation and evaluation of school climate initiatives and strengthen school-parent communication.



## Recommendation #3: Develop multi-tiered supports and programming.

1. Establish a bullying prevention and intervention lead position at the board.
2. Create Board-wide framework that establishes overarching expectations and procedures for a multi-tiered system of supports and programming.
3. Support students involved in bullying.
4. Develop the tools and resources to support schools in developing their own bullying prevention and intervention plans using the PREVNet whole-school approach and other whole-school resources.
5. Work with the Ministry of Education to explore the effectiveness of additional digital monitoring tools specific to cyberbullying and cyber safety. Incorporate effective tools into HWDSB's multi-tiered system of supports and programming for bullying prevention and intervention.
6. Use data collection tools and procedures, including standardized tools, for more localized periodic school-based climate assessment between School Climate Survey cycles.
7. Collect school-level disaggregated data by identity on all reported incidents of bullying, both formal and informal, every six months.
8. Create clear lines of accountability and oversight for school plans, including expectations for monitoring and evaluation.
9. Establish a board-wide mechanism to positively acknowledge and share models of good practice at the school level.



## Recommendation #4:

**Support Schools so they can establish their own bullying prevention and intervention plans.**

1. Ensure that school improvement plans prioritize positive culture and well-being and contain a feasible number of goals with clear measurable targets, for example a maximum of two goals with one already included in the board's Annual Plan.
2. Immediately explore alternative sources of additional adult supervision outside of the classroom during non- instructional time.
3. Each school, including fully remote learning programs, should establish its own bullying prevention and intervention plan and be provided with the necessary resources and expertise to develop and implement a whole-school approach.
4. Ensure student voices are sought out and incorporated into the school's response to incidents of bullying.
5. Ensure that students who are vulnerable or potentially vulnerable, whether or not they have been bullied, are supported in a variety of ways, for example, through a formal initiative that involves a designated staff member.
6. Ensure that assistance is available to parents, guardians and caregivers, including workshops, an inventory of available resources and information on all aspects of bullying.
7. Establish consistent funding for ongoing board-wide professional learning opportunities for educators on bullying prevention and intervention.
8. Collect school-level disaggregated data by identity on all reported incidents of bullying, both formal and informal, and report every six months to the dedicated lead position.
9. Encourage full participation in School Climate surveys and share results with students, parents, guardians, caregivers and community partners.
10. Use available PREVNet resources to train all staff who have contact with students to respond appropriately when they observe bullying.
11. Ensure school-level plans are developed using an intersectional approach to bullying prevention and intervention so they reflect the co-occurrence of bullying and discrimination in its many forms.

### Recommendation #5:

Examine special education practices from a student-centred learning perspective.

1. Review current research on the impact of placement in self-contained classes on student learning, belonging and engagement.
2. Identify evidence-informed best practices to maximize student learning, belonging and engagement.
3. Review student achievement data in the context of HWDSB's priority goals, such as early reading and graduation.
4. Continue to review and refine the special education plan, including programs and services, in keeping with research on equity and inclusion for students with disabilities.
5. Identify ways to enhance supportive inclusion to mitigate the behaviour of some students with special education needs who have difficulty with self-regulation.





## Recommendation #6:

Review policies and procedures from equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression perspectives.

1. Establish a review process with representation from administration, educators and other school staff, principals, students, student councils, parents, guardians, caregivers, unions, Indigenous Education Councils, and community advocacy and service provider partners.
2. Address the areas of concern identified during the review panel consultations.
3. Ensure there is a plan to address, monitor and report on gaps in staff diversity and inequities in professional outcomes at all levels in the board.
4. Reaffirm the role of HWDSB's Equity Policy as a permanent guide to relations between HWDSB and the police.
5. Create a formalized process for periodic review of policies and procedures with feedback from educators, other school staff, principals, students, student councils, parents, guardians, caregivers, Indigenous Education Councils, unions and community partners.
6. Align and integrate the above action steps with HWDSB's Equity Action Plan where appropriate.



## Recommendation #7:

Ensure policies and procedures are followed consistently.

1. The new bullying prevention and intervention lead at the board should establish a review process to address inconsistent and ineffective application of safe schools policies and procedures and related guidelines or codes of conduct.
2. The review process must proactively address the real and perceived unequal application of bullying policies and guidelines based on a student's identity.
3. The review process must address the need for accountability and transparency when a staff member is not following proper protocol, including identifying and addressing the abusive behavior of school staff toward students, other staff, and parents, guardians and caregivers.
4. The review process should examine ways to enhance understanding and support more consistent application of mitigating factors, as defined by the Ministry of Education policy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018b) on suspension and expulsion, when principals are making progressive discipline decisions about incidents of bullying.
5. Administration and staff should work together to develop a clear understanding of what information will and will not be shared, based on privacy obligations, and incorporate this understanding in updated policies and procedures.
6. To prevent situations that cause inequities for students, encourage senior leadership, with input from unions, students and educators, to develop consistent messages about staff roles and responsibilities with respect to bullying prevention and intervention, including active supervision standards such as scope and quality of supervision.
7. Determine, with the help of educators and administrators, what is required to increase uptake and maximize potential of available electronic tools so that critical student background information related to bullying behaviours and incidents is captured and can inform future decisions as the student moves through the system, for example, as they change schools and transition between elementary and secondary.
8. Explore the feasibility of and costs associated with developing an electronic decision-tree resource for educators and school administrators based on PREVNet resources.
9. Consider creating an independent student ombudsperson position for hearing incidents of bullying where the student, parents, guardians and caregivers do not feel safe following the line of authority from teacher to principal, superintendent and trustee.
10. Create a formal process for periodic review at multiple levels with a public accountability component.

# HWDSB ORGANIZATION: SYSTEM LEVEL

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## Recommendation #8:

Set the foundation for a culture of caring.

1. Develop, together with students, a commitment statement specific to bullying prevention and intervention that acknowledges the right of every child to have an education that is free from violence and discrimination.
2. Establish, with input from students, parents, guardians, caregivers and staff, a set of core organizational values and operational principles that will ensure a culture of caring and respect.
3. Establish oversight and accountability structures at the school, system/HWDSB, governance and community levels.
4. Incorporate consistent, standardized bullying outcome measures in the HWDSB performance monitoring framework.
5. Establish a transparent and timely monitoring system for reporting to the Board of Trustees and the broader community on HWDSB's bullying prevention and intervention efforts.



# HWDSB ORGANIZATION: SYSTEM LEVEL (continued)

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## Recommendation #9:

Strengthen the leadership skills needed for culture change.

1. Identify and build upon current leadership best practices to create a culture of caring and positive school climate within HWDSB.
2. Identify the leadership competencies that will enable a whole-child, student-centred, nurturing environment and incorporate them in current and future leadership and performance development opportunities throughout the organization.
3. Leverage opportunities to reinforce the organizational values and culture shift described under Recommendation #8.
4. Ensure there is a plan to address, monitor and report on the gap in staff diversity and inequity of professional outcomes at the senior leadership level, for example turnover rates and opportunity for promotion.
5. Establish the desired leadership performance outcomes for the board's leadership strategy.
6. Consider using an external facilitator for the board's transformation process in order to add credibility and authenticity to the process in the eyes of the community.
7. Recognize and celebrate great relational leadership work.





## Recommendation #10:

Work with a wide range of community partners.

1. Co-create, implement and evaluate the bullying prevention and intervention activities and initiatives in Recommendations 3# and #4 in collaboration with a wide range of new and existing community partners.
2. Utilize existing HWDSB community involvement structures such as parent councils, the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC), SEAC, Indigenous Education Councils and HWDSB Community Advisory committees to support a strengthened focus on school climate.
3. Establish a community-led, independent table with broad representation, including from HWDSB, to oversee implementation of review panel recommendations at the highest level.
4. Identify and learn from schools that have established strong working relationships between community and school for the purposes of bullying prevention and intervention and positive school climate work. Share lessons learned across HWDSB.
5. Identify and support opportunities to work with community partners to address the needs and gaps identified in the review panel process and implement the review panel's recommendations.



## Recommendation #11:

Ask the Ministry of Education for support.

1. Ask the Ministry for centralized, sustained funding for bullying prevention and intervention and positive school climate work, including a dedicated safe schools lead for each school board and resources to implement evidence-informed bullying prevention and intervention programs in schools.
2. Ask the Ministry to make centralized bullying prevention and intervention expertise and supports available to school boards over the long term.
3. Ask the Ministry to continue to update learning curriculum with additional emphasis on social- emotional learning, including empathy and perspective taking, that is implemented through an anti-racist, culturally responsive and relevant lens.
4. Ask the Ministry for funding for ongoing professional learning targeted at bullying prevention and intervention and safe schools.
5. Ask the Ministry to review current supervision policy to address the finding that areas and times of low or no supervision, such as breaks and outdoor recess, present the greatest risk for students.



# HWDSB Alignment

HWDSB Equity Action Plan 2019/20 – 2021/22

HWDSB Employment Equity Action Plan 2020

HWDSB Mental Health and Well-Being Action Plan (2019)

HWDSB Indigenous Education Action Plan (2018)

HWDSB Reimagined: Strategic Priorities (2018)

HWDSB Equity and Inclusion Policy (2018)

HWDSB Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy (2015)

HWDSB Code of Conduct Policy (2019)

HWDSB Student Behaviour and Discipline Policy (2015)

## Appreciation

We thank the many students, families, staff and community members for sharing their voices, stories and expertise so that HWDSB can offer students safe and inclusive schools.



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