HWDSB

Safe Schools Action Plan

HWDSB

What did we do?

We invited students, families and community members to share their feedback about the Draft Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy in 2022. The community consultations were part of the continued work on the Safe Schools Action Plan.

We talked to students, families and community members. In the fall of 2022, we also connected with students who experience bullying, specifically those who self-identify as Indigenous, Black, Racialized, Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ and students with disabilities.

We know that school and education are built from systems that are unfair. They cause harm. Students who self-identify as Indigenous, Black, Racialized, Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ and students with disabilities often experience bullying more often than other groups. We wanted to hear from these students to better understand how we could create a policy and accompanying procedures that would help build a school environment that is safe, supportive and relevant to them.

Procedures are the actions we commit to taking to intervene and prevent bullying in schools. The procedures for this policy will be written once the policy is completed.

Guiding Principles

The consultation was grounded in the following guiding principles. The principles informed our decisions and actions.

Centering Student Voices

We are working closely with students to help us understand what we heard and provide context for their comments. We are also focusing our findings on themes and stories of their experiences. We use direct quotes from them wherever possible.

Acknowledging Social Location

We also understand that gathering information is a reciprocal, highly relational experience. We are changed by what we hear and learn. We also show up in spaces with students with our own biases, lived experiences and values. This means who we are helps us make sense of what we hear; it also can influence how we group themes and report on findings.

Adddressing Bias

To help balance the realities outline above, we adopted a co-analysis process. This means that two team members with different sets of identities and experiences grouped the themes and then talked about what they learned and found. We then shared the themes back with students and the working groups for additional comments/feedback.

Reciprocity

As a school board backed by institutional power, we must be mindful of the burden placed on students, families, and community members whenever we solicit their voices as part of a consultation process. We cannot ask of those with less power, without honouring their time and demonstrating that we value their contributions in some way. Reciprocity, rather than extraction, must guide our engagements. In the spirit of reciprocity, students were provided with food and a gift card at each engagement session.

What did we learn?

We know that historically data gathered from Indigenous, Black, Racialized, Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ and people with disabilities has been used to harm communities. It has been extractive. It has been used as a tool of control and coercion. We understand that our work has the potential to continue this harm. To help address this reality, we adopted a student-centred, community-co-created approach.

We received close to 300 items of feedback from students in 12 sessions in October 2022.

Participants confirmed what the research tells us – students who self-identify as Indigenous, Black, Racialized, Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ and students with disabilities experience a very high percentage of bullying and/or have witnessed bullying.

"i used to be bullied in elementary cus of my skin color but now i've learned to love my black skin" – Student

Students spent most of the time sharing ideas about how to support students experiencing bullying and what changes need to be made in schools when it comes to reporting bullying. They had less to say about cyberbullying

What did students say about...

Supports in Schools

"The best way a school can support students with diverse identities is having people in that school who understand those individuals in some of situations." – Student

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"…I have experienced bullying because of the fact that I am Asian and white however I visibly look asian. In addition I have been stereotyped because of the fact that Asian's are supposed to be the typical "nerd" as mentioned in many movies, tv shows and popular books. Personally I think in order to make a safe environment at school that doesn't support discrimination we need to be discussing about discrimination more in clubs, teams and classes." – Student

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"Actually look into conflicts. I was suspended for getting into a fight, and rightfully so, however I was not talked to before or even after my suspension. If I had been talked to it would have been known that I was being bullied along with my friend and proper action could be taken." – Student

Students focused their comments in two areas:

- Increase communication about pre-existing resources/supports about where to get help
- Increased the number of safe supports available in schools

Suggested structures focused on safe places to go within the school. Students told us that these supports needed to be based on a shared identity between staff and students. This included: clubs, chill-out spaces, counselling, other programs.

Students asked for an increase in learning opportunities about identity, discrimination and race for both staff and students. They also asked for an increase in supports for students who bully.

What did students say about...

Cyberbullying

We asked students to tell us if the section of the policy about cyberbullying reflected their experiences. Students who responded to this question confirmed the definition and description of cyberbullying in the policy reflected their experience.

Reporting Bullying

"When I was getting bullied I would try to hide it ...
Telling people helps so if your being
bullied tell parents and teachers." – Student

Students identified parents/caregivers/guardians as the primary place students go to talk about bullying, followed by teachers, friends and other trusted adults. This is an area where the policy is not aligned with students' experiences. Currently, the policy states: "Students, staff and parents to report incidents of bullying to the Principal immediately when they experience it, witness it or have it reported to them..."

Recommendations

Students were clear about what they would like to see in both the policy and accompanying procedures. Below are the four main themes that came from the consultation.

01

Reporting Bullying

There are various pathways and timelines for reporting for students who self-identify as Indigenous, Black, Racialized, Two Spirit and LGBTQIA+ and students with disabilities. Shared identity and trust built over time play an important role in when/who students report bullying.

Revise the language in the policy to more clearly reflect this reality for students holding these identities.

02

Engaging Parents/Caregivers & Families

Students identified parents as the primary place where they report bullying. This finding is supported in the literature. It indicates the strength and importance of these relationships.

Revise the language in the policy to reflect an asset-based approach.

03

Action in Schools

Student feedback confirms the need for an increase in visibility and availability of supports in schools. Their feedback will help inform the development of the procedures.

Invite students to share their suggestions for procedures. Provide timely updates about how their ideas informed our actions.

04

Anti-Racism-Anti-Oppression

This consultation confirms students and staff learning related to bullying and its connections to identity, particularly race, and discrimination need greater emphasis. Students experience bullying and oppression connected to the diverse identities they hold.

Anchor the policy in an anti-racism, anti-oppression framework (ARAO) to address the systemic inequalities related to bullying.

What happens next?

Students, families and communities are central to the work of Safe Schools. These consultation findings will inform a wider public consultation about the policy in November 2022. After every stage of consultation, board staff review the feedback and recommendations and make revisions to the draft policy before it goes to the trustees for final approval.

Students are invited to continue to shape the work as part of the advisory, in relationship with Safe School staff, or in fututre consultations.

The conversation continues.
Stay connected:
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