



# Equity and Inclusion

Date Approved: 2024

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## PURPOSE:

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) is committed to the principles of equity through inclusive programming, services, and operations, in achieving the goal of providing equitable quality education for all students. This policy aligns with the Board's Human Rights Policy, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Education Act and the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. The Equity and Inclusion Policy affirms the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) in that Indigenous peoples have an inherent and collective right to sovereignty, self-determination and self-government, and as such, this policy is complementary to the Indigenous Education Policy.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- Recognizing our responsibilities as Treaty Partners on the pathway towards Indigenous Educational Wellness, in friendship with sovereign host nations and the urban Indigenous communities of Hamilton.
- Fostering an anti-racist and anti-oppressive learning and working environments through acknowledging, understanding, and addressing systems of oppressions that can result in systemic inequalities and inequitable educational outcomes.
- Implementing equitable and inclusive education strategies that are fundamental in providing quality education and addressing inequities in educational opportunities, student achievement and well-being outcomes, through high quality educational practices that are culturally and linguistically relevant and responsive.
- Promoting employment equity by identifying and removing barriers to equitable employment to develop a diverse workforce that reflects and is responsive to the diverse experiences of the student population.
- Creating a culture of human rights and anti-discrimination by identifying, challenging, and responding to discriminatory practices, biases and systemic barriers to ensure that students and staff learn and work in environments free from discrimination and harassment.
- Strengthening inclusive school community partnerships by building reciprocal and meaningful relationships with families and community partners.
- Improving mental health and well-being outcomes through supportive, respectful, inclusive, and culturally relevant learning and working environments.
- Providing shared leadership through independent and collaborative commitment to continuous learning and professional development to embed equity and inclusion.
- Fostering accountable and compassionate leadership in developing and maintaining appropriate mechanisms to openly communicate the Board's actions in addressing inequities.



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## INTENDED OUTCOMES:

- Students and staff feel a sense of belonging and can learn and work in inclusive and equitable environments.
- Identify and address systemic barriers and discriminatory practices that reproduce disproportional educational outcomes.
- Nurture reciprocal relationships between Indigenous Peoples and Treaty Partners in a shared effort towards a restorative education system.
- Principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in all aspects of the Board's policies, operations, learning and working environments.
- Support inclusive community partnerships, engagement and communication of ongoing progress.
- Establish mechanisms to measure progress towards equity and inclusion.

## RESPONSIBILITY:

Director of Education  
 Members of Executive Council  
 System and School Leaders  
 HWDSB Staff

## TERMINOLOGY:<sup>i</sup>

*Accountability:* Refers to the process whereby organizations and institutions as members of a diverse community are subject to the obligation to maintain a certain level of ethics and responsiveness and reporting regarding the quality, effectiveness and relevance of their service or practices and the method of delivery.

*Anti-oppression:* A proactive and consistent process of acknowledging different forms of oppression (colonialism, racism, ableism, classism, sexism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, classism, islamophobia, antisemitism, and other forms); and of seeking to identify, challenge, disrupt and eliminate oppressive ideologies, practices, and outcomes.

*Anti-racism:* A proactive and consistent process of acknowledging racism; and of seeking to identify, challenge, disrupt and eliminate racism in all its forms (individual, institutional, systemic racism).

*Barrier:* Anything that prevents a person or groups of people with shared identities from fully taking part in all aspects of society, including physical, architectural, information or communications, attitudinal, economic and technological barriers, as well as policies or practices.

*Bias:* An opinion, preference, prejudice, or inclination that limits an individual's or a group's ability to make fair, objective, or accurate judgements.



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**Community Partnerships:** Collaborative relationships between institutions and groups within the community in which there is recognition of the experience of participants and evidence of their involvement in the decision making of the institutions.

**Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogies:** An inclusive education system, students must see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, so that they can feel engaged in and empowered by their learning experiences. Students need to experience teaching and learning that reflect their needs and who they are. To ensure that this happens, educators in Ontario schools embrace culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (CRRP), which recognizes that all students learn in ways that are connected to background, language, family structure, and social or cultural identity. ([Ministry of Education](#))

**Discrimination:** Unfair or prejudicial treatment of individuals or groups on the basis of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, family status, disability, gender expression, gender identity, receipt of public assistance, record of offences (in employment only), as set out in the Ontario Human Rights Code, or on the basis of other, similar factors. Discrimination, whether intentional or unintentional, has the effect of preventing or limiting access to opportunities, benefits, or advantages that are available to other members of society. Discrimination may be evident in organizational and institutional structures, policies, procedures, and programs, as well as in the attitudes and behaviours of individuals.

**Employment Equity:** A program designed to remove systemic barriers to equality of outcome in employment by identifying and eliminating discriminatory policies and practices, remedying the effects of past discrimination, and ensuring appropriate representation of designated groups, i.e., women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities. Employment equity programs usually involve setting goals and timelines in order to ensure that defined objectives are met by a specified date.

**Equality:** The principle that each person must be treated equally by and under the law. In Canada, the right to equality is enshrined in provincial and federal human rights legislations and the Charter. Equality is often understood by the notions of both formal equality (treating everyone the same in all situations) and substantive equality (treating some differently than others in order to treat some equally).

**Equitable:** Just or characterized by fairness or equity. Equitable treatment can at times differ from same treatment.

**Equity:** A condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.

**Identity-based data:** Refers to the socio-demographics information about a person including, but not limited to, their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity and so on.

**Inclusion:** While diversity is the presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society, inclusion is about people with different identities feeling valued, accepted and welcomed within an environment. Having diversity doesn't mean there is inclusion.



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*Inclusive Education:* Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.

*Indigenous Educational Wellness:* An approach fostered by Indigenous communities to work collaboratively to develop an understanding of the relationship between education and wellness, and the historic legislative abuses that Indigenous communities continue to heal from while fostering an understanding that education is a part of total wellness and reframe Indigenous Education discourse using rich Indigenous Knowledge and pedagogies.

*Ontario Human Rights Code:* A provincial law that gives everyone equal rights and opportunities, without discrimination, in special areas such as education, jobs, housing, and services. The goal of the Code is to address and ultimately prevent discrimination and harassment. ([Ontario Human Rights Code](#))

*Racism:* A set of erroneous assumptions, opinions and actions stemming from the belief that one race is inherently superior to another. Racism may be evident in organizational and institutional structures, policies, procedures, and programs, as well as in the attitudes and behaviours of individuals.

*Restorative Indigenous Education:* A tempered learning environment that reflects true reconciliatory actions and the reemergence of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies that communities were deprived of for so long.

*Self-determination:* The right of Indigenous Peoples to manage their affairs, provide stewardship over the land, maintain a cultural and political community, and uphold government-to-government relations with all other nations, including present-day nation states. The criteria for maintaining nationhood status, language, culture, ceremony, governance and territory, must be honored.

*Sovereignty:* Indigenous peoples maintain a distinct identity as the only group who have nation to nation agreements with the Crown. Treaty and other rights and freedoms entrenched in The Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms related to land resources and protections, as well as the right to deal directly with the Crown.

*Systemic barrier:* A barrier embedded in the social or administrative structures of an organization, including the physical accessibility of an organization, organizational policies, practices, and decision-making processes, or the culture of an organization. These may appear neutral on the surface but exclude members of groups protected by the Human Rights Code.

*Systemic discrimination:* Patterns of behaviour, policies or practices that are part of the social or administrative structures of an organization which create or perpetuate a position of relative disadvantage, advantage, or privilege for people of certain for groups.

## ACTION REQUIRED:

- Review, update and implement the Board's Human Rights and Equity Action Plan.
- Review, update and implement the Equity and Inclusion Procedures

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## PROGRESS INDICATORS:

Intended Outcome	Assessment
Students and staff feel a sense of belonging and learn and work in inclusive and equitable environments.	Student Voice Surveys Staff Voice Surveys Parent Voice Survey
Identify and address systemic barriers and discriminatory practices that reproduce disproportional educational opportunities outcomes.	Student Census Staff Census Disproportionality Reports
Nurture reciprocal relationships between Indigenous Peoples and Treaty Partners in a shared effort towards a restorative education system.	Indigenous Education Circle Strategic Action Plan Board Improvement Plan Disproportionality Reports School Improvement Plans
Principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in all aspects of the Board's policies, operations, learning and working environments.	Policy reviews Board Improvement Plan School Improvement Plans
Support inclusive community partnerships, engagement and communication of ongoing progress.	Partnership Database Parent Voice survey
Establish mechanisms to measure progress towards equity and inclusion.	Identity-based data collection (Staff and Student Census) Disproportionality Reports Human Rights and Equity Action Plan Implementation Reports

## REFERENCES:

[Ontario Human Rights Code](#)  
[Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](#)  
[Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms](#)  
[Ministry of Education Policy and Program Memorandum 119 Education Act](#)  
[United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People](#)  
[HWDSB Human Rights Policy](#)

<sup>i</sup> Sources for definitions are Ontario Human Rights Commission, Ontario Anti-racism Directorate, Ontario Education Equity Action Plan, Restorative Journey: Indigenous Educational Wellness