

2021-2023 SAFE SCHOOLS ACTION PLAN FINAL REPORT

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

November 2024

HWDSB
BE YOU. BE EXCELLENT.

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INTRODUCTION

In its review of the objectives outlined in the **2021-2023 Safe Schools Action Plan**, HWDSB has made significant efforts in promoting safe, inclusive, and caring learning environments that honour the voices of all members of its community; students, parents/guardians/caregivers.

Guided by the recommendations in the Safe Schools: Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel's final report, Building Healthy Relationships and an Inclusive, Caring Learning Environment, we have implemented and continue to strengthen the following actions:

- **Fostering Inclusive Cultures:** We have focused on cultivating positive and inclusive cultures in all classrooms and schools, ensuring that every student feels a sense of belonging, safety, and opportunity for success.
- **Centering Student Identity and Voice:** HWDSB schools prioritize student identity and voice as central components of the learning environment. Engagement with identity affirming curriculum and teaching practices continues to create.
- **Strengthening Supportive Relationships:** We prioritize positive, supportive, and caring relationships across our system. Students are at the heart of our work, and we are committed to nurturing environments where dignity is paramount, and everyone is treated with compassion and respect.
- **Listening to and Acting on Student Voice:** Structures have been strengthened to ensure student voice informs school and board decisions. Through regular consultation, we actively listen to students and integrate their feedback into policies and initiatives.
- **Ensuring Safety and Active Involvement:** We have increased our focus on student safety by addressing bullying with the active involvement of students and caregivers/families, which includes all those affected by these incidents, the student experiencing bullying, those displaying bullying behaviors, and those witnessing it.

Accountability and Engagement:

To keep the community informed, HWDSB shares regular updates and reports progress on our goals. We've developed and continue to responsively create mechanisms to ensure that voices from across the community inform both school and board plans, fostering transparency and accountability.

Building Trust and Engagement:

Our efforts extend to building relationships and trust through our actions—actively listening, responding, and continually engaging with those impacted by decisions. We hold ourselves accountable for improvements in student safety and well-being, both at the school and system levels.

RECOMMENDATION 1

1. Involving Students in Co-Creation, Implementation, and Evaluation of Bullying Prevention Activities:

HWDSB's commitment to student agency has been embedded in the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan and the Specialized Services Action Plan, which prioritize the inclusion of every student, including students with disabilities, in decision-making processes. Students are encouraged to co-create bullying prevention strategies that consider diverse needs, ensuring that all voices, including those from underrepresented groups, inform and influence the direction of bullying prevention and intervention initiatives.

Action Example: HWDSB aims to have every student participate in focus groups and advisory settings that have contributed to policy updates and the design of bullying prevention resources. This process has helped to ensure that the experiences of students are taken into consideration in planning and the evaluation of school climate initiatives to date.

2. Building Regular Mechanisms for Capturing Student Voices:

Building on HWDSB's Human Rights and Equity Action Plan and Mental Health Strategy, and in coordination with the Specialized Services Action Plan, regular mechanisms have been created and are supported both locally and centrally to capture the voices of all students, including those in specialized programs. This includes using a variety of accessible, and interactive methods to ensure all students can share their perspectives with respect to bullying and school climate.

Action Example: HWDSB uses digital platforms, in-person meetings, and accessible tools such as visual aids and communication devices to ensure that students with disabilities can meaningfully contribute their perspectives and lived experience. For example, the School Climate Survey is supplemented by additional accessible formats to reach all students.

3. Incorporating Student Voices into Responses to Bullying:

In accordance with the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan and Specialized Services Action Plan, which emphasizes a student-centered approach, the input of the full diversity of our students and students with disabilities is sought when developing school responses to bullying incidents. This ensures that the school's responses are not only inclusive but also consider the specific needs and experiences of students who may face additional barriers to engagement.

Action Example: School response teams incorporate feedback from all students, including those with disabilities, using HWDSB resources to shape restorative and equitable responses to bullying. This approach ensures that all perspectives are considered, especially those of vulnerable students and ways in which they can feel their voices have been heard.

4. Including Student Voice and Metrics in Bullying Prevention Framework:

HWDSB continues to develop ways to integrate student feedback into its bullying prevention metrics, informed by Human Rights and Equity Action Plan principles, as well as the Specialized Services Action Plan. The data collected focuses on student belonging, engagement, and the role of supportive adults, including specific indicators for students with disabilities or other specialized needs.

Action Example: Metrics include data on bullying prevalence and student experiences, with specific attention to the needs of students who are in special education and/or face other identity-based barriers. These are used to inform the development of individualized, school, and system - wide strategies that promote belonging for all students.

5. Sharing Student Voice Data with the School Community:

HWDSB shares student feedback, including insights from students with disabilities, with the broader school community—parents, guardians, caregivers, and community partners—through the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan and Specialized Services Action Plan and other related initiatives. This transparent communication is a key strategy for building trust and engaging the community in addressing bullying and fostering a positive school climate.

Action Example: The results from a variety of student voice surveys and School Climate Surveys are shared during school council meetings, parent workshops, and community partnerships, with a special focus on ensuring that the voices of students with disabilities are heard and acted upon.

6. Developing Interactive Resources for Allyship and Upstander Behavior:

Working with and in partnership with students, HWDSB continues to develop interactive, accessible resources designed to teach all students, including those in special education programs, how to be allies and upstanders in bullying prevention. These resources reflect a whole-school approach to allyship, with specific adaptations for students with diverse needs.

Action Example: Students (and staff) are supported with resources that support the co-creation of visual guides, scenario-based conversations, and digital toolkits that teach their peers how to support classmates who may be experiencing bullying, as well as foster a sense of shared responsibility. Additionally, tools such as Responding to Bias, Prejudice and Hate provide a framework for adults to model effective response protocols for students. Reimagining Wellness lessons guide educators to co-construct a “STOP” response protocol that includes interruption, identification, explaining and supporting those harmed, asking for change, reporting the incident and ensuring accountability.

7. Involving Students as Leaders in School Improvement Teams:

HWDSB actively involves students in leadership roles on school improvement teams. This commitment is reinforced in the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan and Specialized Services Action Plan, which ensures that students in specialized programs are given leadership opportunities that reflect their experiences and strengths.

Action Example: Students actively participate in leadership teams, bringing their unique perspectives to school climate discussions and policy development, ensuring that improvements benefit every student.

8. Ensuring Adult Allyship for Student-Led Activities:

Recognizing the importance of adult mentorship, HWDSB ensures that all student-created bullying prevention initiatives, particularly those led by students, are supported by adult allies. This is in line with the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan and Specialized Services Action Plan, which emphasizes the need for supportive adults who can guide and mentor students as they take leadership roles.

Action Example: Teachers and school staff, trained in inclusive practices, support student-led initiatives like affinity groups (system and school-based), student voice conferences and other student-leadership groups by providing mentorship and guidance to ensure the activities are effective, inclusive, and accessible to all students.

9. Considering the Perspectives of All Students:

HWDSB’s approach to bullying prevention is holistic and considers the perspectives of all students involved in bullying situations—those who experience bullying, those who exhibit bullying behaviors, and those who witness bullying. This approach is informed by both the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan and Specialized Services Action Plan, which prioritize understanding and addressing the unique needs of students with disabilities and other underserved groups.

Action Example: When bullying occurs, the responses are tailored to ensure that the perspectives of every student involved are considered. This includes creating individualized support/safety plans and restorative practices that respect the diverse needs of all students involved.

10. Aligning Actions with Equity and Well-Being Initiatives:

The bullying prevention and intervention strategies within HWDSB are aligned with the broader goals of the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan, Mental Health Strategy, and Indigenous Education Circle Action Plan, as well as the Specialized Services Action Plan. This alignment ensures that bullying prevention initiatives promote inclusion, mental health, and equity for every student, including those with specialized learning needs.

Action Example: Strategies designed to combat bullying incorporate mental health support services, culturally relevant pedagogy, and specialized services for students with disabilities, ensuring comprehensive and inclusive approaches to well-being.

11. Ensuring Student Leadership in the Development and Implementation of Action Steps:

Every student plays a critical role in developing and implementing action steps to address bullying, as outlined in the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan and Specialized Services Action Plan. Their involvement ensures that all action steps reflect the lived experiences of students, particularly those from underserved groups.

Action Example: Students of all identities and abilities are central in continuing to develop future Safe Schools Action Plans, including recommendations for future bullying prevention initiatives, contributing to an ongoing, student-led approach to improving school climate. Opportunities to share lived experience in a variety of ways and forums will remain at the forefront of this work.

RECOMMENDATION 2

1. Sharing Educational Resources on Bullying with Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers:

HWDSB's Multi-Year Strategic Plan, supported by its Human Rights and Equity Action Plan and Specialized Services Action Plan and Mental Health Strategy ensure that resources on bullying, including cyberbullying, aggression, and teasing, are shared equitably with all parents, guardians, and caregivers. HWDSB continues to strive to provide accessible, culturally relevant, and comprehensive educational materials that explain the difference between bullying, aggression, and teasing, as well as the impact of bullying on students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds and students with disabilities.

Action Example: HWDSB provides families with a variety of resources that outline the different forms of bullying, its effects, and how to recognize the signs. These resources include Cyberbullying Information Sheets, PrevNet Guides, School Mental Health Ontario resources, supports and tools, and specific infographics, including those focused on legal consequences and how to respond to bullying.

Inclusive Communication: Resources have been created and made available in multiple formats (digital, printed) and languages, with specialized formats for families of students with disabilities to ensure the accessibility of the information.

2. Sharing Emerging Educational Resources on Cyberbullying:

HWDSB remains committed to keeping parents, guardians, and caregivers informed about new and emerging resources related to cyberbullying as they become available (and relevant). This is consistent with HWDSB's Mental Health Strategy and the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan, which both emphasize the need for timely and relevant parent resources to support student well-being in an increasingly digital world.

Action Example: As new resources and research emerge on cyberbullying, HWDSB will share these resources via email newsletters, school council meetings, and online portals for parents. These include materials like PrevNet Cyberbullying Infographics and guides on how to navigate online spaces safely.

3. Involving Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers in Co-Creation, Implementation, and Evaluation:

HWDSB's Multi-Year Strategic Plan and associated Action Plans and Strategies highlight the importance of collaborative partnerships with parents, guardians, and caregivers. Structures continue to be developed and refined to maximize opportunities for involvement in the co-creation and evaluation of bullying prevention strategies and interventions. This collaboration ensures that the programs developed are responsive to the needs of diverse families, including those of students with disabilities and Indigenous backgrounds.

Action Example: Parents and caregivers have participated in focus groups, surveys, and workshops to co-create bullying prevention strategies. In particular, a Parent Advisory group was established, and supported in both in-person and virtual formats, and were designed to accommodate the diverse needs of the HWDSB community.

4. Establishing Accessible Mechanisms for Parent Input and Feedback:

HWDSB has established and continues to develop and refine regular, representative, and accessible mechanisms for obtaining feedback from parents, guardians, and caregivers about bullying prevention and intervention strategies. The Specialized Services Action Plan supports the inclusion of families of students with disabilities in these processes, ensuring that all families can provide input.

Action Example: Feedback mechanisms include school councils, email surveys, and community consultation meetings held at both the school and system levels. The Human Rights and Equity Action Plan ensures that all families, including those from marginalized communities, can easily access these opportunities for feedback through a variety of platforms, including translated materials and accessible digital formats.

5. Expanding Parental Involvement in School Climate Initiatives:

The Human Rights and Equity Action Plan, Indigenous Education Circle Action Plan, and Mental Health Strategy work in tandem to expand the ways parents, guardians, and caregivers can participate in shaping school climate. These plans focus specifically on ensuring that involvement is accessible to all, including those who may face barriers to engagement.

Action Example: Parents/caregivers/guardians are encouraged to engage in school climate initiatives through various roles, such as serving on school councils, Parent Involvement Committees (PIC), Safe Schools Parent Advisory and other opportunities at the system and school levels. These provide parents/caregivers/guardians with opportunities to be actively involved in the development, implementation, and evaluation of bullying prevention strategies and broader school climate initiatives.

RECOMMENDATION 3

1. Establish a Bullying Prevention and Intervention Lead Position at the Board:

HWDSB's Equity Action Plan emphasizes the importance of leadership in driving systemic change. By establishing a dedicated Bullying Prevention and Intervention Lead at the board level, HWDSB ensured greater accountability and strategic oversight in addressing bullying across all schools.

Action Example: While in place, the Bullying Prevention Lead was responsible for coordinating initiatives, ensuring alignment with HWDSB's strategic plans, and providing guidance to schools with the implementation of evidence-based practices in bullying prevention and intervention. This role also includes liaising with special education teams from the Specialized Services and Human Rights and Equity teams to support students with disabilities and those from historically underserved groups.

2. Create a Board-Wide Framework for a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) for Bullying Prevention and Intervention:

HWDSB's Mental Health Strategy and Human Rights and Equity Action Plan both support the creation of a Board-Wide Framework for bullying prevention that aligns with the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). As these student specific plans evolve, this framework will help guide schools in developing their own bullying prevention and intervention plans using a whole-school approach.

Action Example: The MTSS Framework will include tiered supports for students involved in bullying (Tier 1: Prevention, Tier 2: Interventions, Tier 3: Response). These supports are designed to ensure that schools are equipped to address bullying at multiple levels and with a range of strategies, from universal programming to individualized interventions. This framework also emphasizes culturally responsive practices as outlined in the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan and Indigenous Education Circle Action Plan, ensuring that bullying prevention strategies are relevant to every student, including Indigenous and those historically underserved.

3. Support Students Involved in Bullying:

The Specialized Services Action Plan addresses the need for targeted support for all students involved in bullying, including both the student experiencing the bullying behaviour, as well as those displaying bullying behaviors, and those witnessing it. The Mental Health Action Plan also strives to support school teams with processes and actions to respond to student needs. Specific efforts will be made to support students with disabilities, as outlined in the Specialized Services Action Plan, ensuring that these students have access to tailored interventions that promote belonging, engagement, and positive behavior change.

Action Example: HWDSB will implement individualized supports for students involved in bullying, using a multi-tiered system of support framework to provide interventions based on the severity and nature of the situation. This includes mental health supports, restorative practices, and social-emotional learning initiatives.

4. Develop Tools and Resources for Schools to Create Their Own Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plans:

HWDSB continues to develop and provide schools with tools and resources to assist in developing comprehensive bullying prevention and intervention plans, utilizing PREVNet's Whole-School Approach and other evidence-based resources.

Action Example: The PREVNet Whole-School Approach and other resources have been used to create a HWDSB Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan. This plan, along with a companion template, will be used to help schools design and implement bullying prevention strategies that are tailored to their unique needs.

For example, Reimagining Wellness focuses on this approach and is supported by staff training and the development of clear, student-centered protocols for addressing bullying in all forms, including cyberbullying. These resources have included lesson plans, PowerPoints, and guidelines for staff and students, ensuring that schools have the necessary tools to foster safer and more inclusive environments.

5. Work with the Ministry of Education to Explore the Effectiveness of Additional Digital Tools in the Bullying Prevention and Intervention System:

HWDSB is committed to incorporating new, innovative tools into its bullying prevention strategies. The Human Rights and Equity Action Plan and Mental Health Strategy support ongoing collaboration with the Ministry of Education to explore how digital tools can enhance bullying prevention efforts.

Action Example: HWDSB continues to explore the use of digital platforms, such as online reporting tools and resources for students and families, to complement the existing MTSS framework. This has included tools for anonymous reporting, virtual counseling, and digital citizenship education, particularly for addressing cyberbullying.

6. Use Data Collection Tools for Periodic School-Based Climate Assessment:

HWDSB continues to explore existing data collection tools, including standardized climate assessments, both ministry provided (EQAO) and unique to HWDSB to regularly evaluate school climate between the School Climate Survey cycles.

Action Example: Where required, localized school climate assessments are conducted at regular intervals to ensure ongoing monitoring of bullying and school climate issues. These assessments will be designed to identify trends, challenges, and areas of strength, enabling schools to make data-driven decisions for school improvement planning. As part of the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan, (where possible) data will be disaggregated by identity (e.g., gender, disability status, cultural background) to ensure a more nuanced understanding of bullying dynamics.

7. Collect School-Level Disaggregated Data by Identity on All Reported Incidents of Bullying:

As part of its new Multi-Year Strategic Plan, HWDSB continues to develop a process to collect disaggregated data on Human rights and equity related bullying incidents, ensuring accountability and targeted interventions to support the target, witness and the student(s) causing harm.

Action Example: Currently, data collection can track incidents of bullying. Disaggregation by student identity, including gender, race, ability, and other key characteristics continues to be operationalized in a way that demonstrates the disproportional rates at which students are bullied. HWDSB's work in supporting Human Rights and Equity continues to ensure that the responses to these disparities in bullying rates are proactive in nature and tailor support(s) accordingly.

8. Create Clear Lines of Accountability and Oversight for School Plans:

The Mental Health Strategy, Human Rights and Equity Action Plan and Specialized Services Action Plans each highlight the need for clear accountability structures to support and ensure that bullying prevention efforts are effective and sustained.

Action Example: HWDSB continues to review and update its school improvement planning process to require Schools submit their bullying prevention plans as part of the review process with student voice from the school community, as well as Parent Council, Superintendent, who will ensure that plans are reflective of both school and system policies and procedures. Regular check-ins and updates will include feedback loops with superintendents, school administrators, staff, students, and families to ensure that progress is being made, and goals are being met (and revised, where necessary).

9. Establish a Board-Wide Mechanism to Positively Acknowledge and Share Models of Good Practice:

HWDSB regularly recognizes and shares successful bullying prevention practices across schools, as part of its commitment to promoting continuous learning and improvement thinking in all schools.

Action Example: HWDSB supports weekly sharing of best practices and resources through its internal communication where staff share successful bullying prevention strategies, case studies, and innovative practice. This continues to support a collaborative environment where school leaders learn from each other and continuously improve their bullying prevention efforts. Even more specifically, exceptional practices and school initiatives are showcased at board-wide meetings, in communications with the community, and through school awards, ensuring that effective practices are celebrated and widely adopted.

RECOMMENDATION 3

1. Ensure that School Improvement Plans Prioritize Positive Culture and Well-Being:

HWDSB ensures that each school's improvement plan is focused on creating positive school cultures that promote student well-being. This is done by setting a maximum of two primary goals that are achievable and measurable, one of which aligns with the Board Improvement Plan's broader objectives, such as fostering a safe and inclusive school climate.

Action Example: Schools will prioritize a goal centered on student safety and well-being, which is tracked through measurable targets like a decrease in bullying incidents or an increase in student engagement and belonging. These targets are evaluated regularly to ensure progress.

2. Explore Alternative Sources of Additional Adult Supervision During Non-Instructional Time:

As part of its efforts to ensure student safety during non-instructional times, such as recess or lunch breaks, HWDSB continues to explore alternative sources of adult supervision, such as utilizing support staff, community volunteers, and/or peer leadership programs.

Action Example: In an effort to address this area, HWDSB worked with schools to pilot Recess Guardians, a recess program designed to build the leadership ability of student leaders/mentors in leading multiple opportunities for younger students to participate in organized play and reduce rates of conflict during these games/activities.

3. Each School Should Establish Its Own Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan:

HWDSB continues to develop and provide schools with tools and resources needed to develop comprehensive bullying prevention and intervention plans, utilizing the PREVNet Whole-School Approach and other evidence-based resources.

Action Example: The PREVNet Whole-School Approach and other resources have been used to help schools design and implement bullying prevention strategies that are tailored to their unique needs. Reimagining Wellness focuses on this approach and is supported by staff training and the development of clear, student-centered protocols for addressing bullying in all forms, including cyberbullying. These resources have included lesson plans, PowerPoints, and guidelines for staff and students, ensuring that schools have the necessary tools to foster safe and inclusive environments.

4. Ensure Student Voices are Incorporated into School Responses to Bullying:

HWDSB ensures that student voices are central in the development and implementation of bullying responses. This is in line with HWDSB's commitment to student-centered decision-making.

Action Example: Students and their families are continually engaged through focus groups, surveys, and school committees to gather their perspectives on bullying incidents and solutions. This feedback will directly inform the school's response and any disciplinary actions taken.

5. Support Vulnerable Students in a Variety of Ways:

HWDSB continues to establish formal initiatives that are supportive of vulnerable students, ensuring they are protected and nurtured, even if they have not directly experienced bullying. Vulnerable students will have access to a designated staff member who will work with them to provide the necessary support and resources.

Action Example: Currently, vulnerable students receive additional support, as required, to support a sense of safety and well-being. Specific supports and resources such as mental health counseling, peer mentoring, or social skills development, depending on their individual needs. Staff are in place to support these needs in a variety of ways and settings.

6. Provide Assistance to Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers:

HWDSB always strives to ensure that parents, guardians, and caregivers have access to resources and workshops about bullying prevention, as well as information on types of bullying (including cyberbullying), its impact, and ways to address it.

Action Example: Schools have hosted workshops on bullying and cyberbullying and continue to distribute resources like the Caregiver Information Sheet on Cyberbullying and PrevNet Bullying Policy & Legislation guides. These resources are available on HWDB's website, in multiple languages and formats to ensure accessibility.

7. Provide Consistent Funding for Ongoing Board-Wide Professional Learning on Bullying Prevention:

Ongoing professional learning opportunities and associated resources continue to be provided and updated annually to support educators in building expertise in bullying prevention and intervention, as well as the importance healthy relationships play in prevention. All of this work is aligned with the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan.

Action Example: HWDSB continues to prioritize local learning and professional development opportunities. Reimagining Wellness continues to support educators in implementing PREVNet's strategies for recognizing and addressing bullying and fostering inclusive environments. Learning and professional development has included prevention, intervention and response strategies and tools, including cultural competency and awareness training, and mental health and wellness literacy.

8. Collect Disaggregated Data on Bullying Incidents:

As a system, HWDSB continues to work to develop supports and tools to collect disaggregated data on bullying incidents, as well as other key school climate data sets and their impact on student's feeling of safety and well-being. This data will be reviewed by Schools teams and HWDSB system supports to monitor patterns and guide the board and school planning processes.

Action Example: HWDSB has started to develop tools to collect data by identity (e.g., race, gender, disability) to identify any disproportionate bullying incidents among certain student groups. Schools will continue to use this information to inform interventions and improve school climate.

9. Encourage Participation in School Climate Surveys and Share Results:

HWDSB is continuously looking at different tools and ways to assess and improve school climate. While school climate surveys are one way we are doing this, multiple voice structures and groups at both the school and system levels help to better hear the voices of every student, especially those traditionally underserved. Results will be shared transparently with students, parents, guardians, caregivers, and community partners to promote accountability and inclusivity.

Action Example: HWDSB's Research and Analytics department continues to develop ways to share survey results, as well as tools to support schools to analyze and identify areas for improvement. Findings will be shared through the school improvement planning process, in school newsletters, parent meetings, and at school council events. HWDSB will continue to ensure that these results inform board and school improvement plans and decisions on reviewing and refining bullying interventions and responses.

10. Use PREVNet Resources to Train Staff:

Staff who have direct contact with students will be trained using PREVNet's resources to ensure that they respond appropriately to bullying incidents when they observe them.

Action Example: HWDSB has created numerous training resources and programs that highlight prevention, as well as healthy conflict resolution, restorative practices, and peer mediation. Reimagining Wellness is a central resource that supports all of this work, ensuring that all staff are equipped to handle relationship situations effectively and to foster safe, inclusive learning environments.

11. Ensure School-Level Plans Use an Intersectional Approach:

School-level bullying prevention and intervention plans will be developed using an intersectional approach, recognizing the diverse identities and experiences of students, including race, gender, ability, and socio-economic status.

Action Example: Each school's bullying plan will be tailored to address specific challenges faced by students from marginalized groups, including students with disabilities, Indigenous students, and those from racialized communities. This ensures that the plan is equitable and addresses all forms of discrimination.

RECOMMENDATION 5

HWDSB's Specialized Services Action Plan demonstrates a clear commitment to examining and improving special education practices through a student-centered learning perspective. The following actions outline how these key objectives are being addressed:

1. Reviewing the Impact of Placement in Special Education Classes on Student Learning, Belonging, and Engagement:

HWDSB has been actively engaged in exploring ways and methods of review and evaluation of the impact of placement in Special Education classes on student outcomes, focusing on learning, belonging, and engagement. In particular, HWDSB's Research and Data Department are determining data best used to analyze in order to better understand how these placements might impact students' overall educational experience(s). As part of this review, anecdotal "street data" from students, caregivers, and educators will be incorporated to ensure the decisions align with the best interests of students.

Action Example: The Board is conducting reviews of student placement in special education programs to identify whether such settings foster belonging and engagement or if inclusion-based approaches would better serve students' needs.

2. Identifying Evidence-Informed Best Practices to Maximize Student Learning, Belonging, and Engagement:

HWDSB prioritizes the use of evidence-based practices that enhance student learning, engagement, and a sense of belonging, ensuring that students with disabilities are supported to succeed in an inclusive environment. Specialized programs and services, as outlined in the Specialized Services Action Plan, provide a holistic approach, integrating best practices from research and community feedback.

Action Plan Example: The Board has integrated strategies that support differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), providing personalized support and fostering a sense of belonging for all students.

3. Reviewing Student Achievement Data in the Context of HWDSB's Priority Goals (Early Reading and Graduation):

To monitor student progress, HWDSB reviews achievement data to assess how well students with disabilities are performing in key areas such as early reading and graduation rates. The Board's priority goals focus on improving student outcomes, and this data is critical in identifying potential gaps in achievement and implementing targeted supports.

Action Plan Example: Data analysis is conducted regularly to track the performance of students in literacy, and strategies are adjusted based on findings to ensure that all students, including those in specialized programs, meet the Board's improvement goals. The use of achievement data also helps inform decisions regarding the alignment of services to promote higher graduation rates, including the support and mentorship of Graduation Coaches for Black Students across seven high schools.

4. Providing Services in Line with Research on Equity and Inclusion for Students with Disabilities:

HWDSB's Specialized Services Action Plan is aligned with ongoing research on equity and inclusion for students with disabilities. The action plan focuses on ensuring that all students, especially those with disabilities, have access to equitable and inclusive educational opportunities.

Action Plan Example: The Board is expanding inclusive practices, including increasing access to mainstream classrooms, ensuring students with disabilities can participate in all aspects of school life. It also involves building capacity of educators in inclusive teaching methods to cater to diverse needs.

5. Enhancing Supportive Inclusion to Mitigate the Behavior of Some Students:

The Specialized Services Action Plan emphasizes creating an inclusive environment that supports students with a wide range of behavioral needs. This includes identifying practices that prevent and mitigate negative behavior through a focus on positive behaviour interventions and supports (PBIS) and restorative practices.

Action Plan Example: The Board has implemented strategies such as providing targeted interventions, building strong relationships between students and educators, and fostering positive peer interactions. The focus is on reducing barriers and improving interfering behavior through proactive, strength-based approaches, ensuring that students remain engaged in their learning and feel supported.

RECOMMENDATION 6

1. Establish a Review Process with Representation from Key Stakeholders:

HWDSB continually prioritizes the creation and review of processes and protocols that ensure a broad range of voices are heard and integrated into decision-making and policy development. This involves collaboration among administration, educators, school staff, principals, students, student councils, parents, guardians, caregivers, unions, Indigenous Education Councils, and community partners.

Action Example: HWDSB regularly reviews policies or initiatives, incorporating a phased consultation process that engages students in ways that they will share their thoughts through their lived experience. Additionally, broader consultation takes place using an electronic platform “Engage” that provides opportunities for parents, guardians, caregivers and community to share best thinking. Although always trying to find new ways to do this, HWDSB strives to ensure that all members of its community have a chance to share feedback on issues like bullying prevention, school climate, and staff development. This feedback will be integrated into actionable recommendations to improve practices and ensure that the voices of diverse communities are included in decision-making processes.

2. Comprehensive Bullying Prevention and Support Strategies:

HWDSB is committed to fostering safe, inclusive, and equitable learning environments by implementing clear definitions of bullying, including how bias, discrimination and hate are often not bullying, but in fact acts of hate. We will enhance reporting systems, provide individualized safety plans for students, and ensure active involvement from parents and staff. These actions align with the HWDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan and Human Rights and Equity Action Plan, ensuring policies reflect our commitment to equity and the holistic development of every student.

A). Clear Definition and Understanding:

Ensure a consistent, comprehensive definition of bullying, including racist bullying, microaggressions, and the responsible use of technology and social media. These definitions will reflect the principles of equity and human rights.

Action Example: All students, staff, and volunteers continue to receive professional development, as well as lessons to further educate and remind all HWDSB community members of the expectations to create the conditions necessary to prevent and respond to bullying, with a focus on equity, anti-racism, and inclusive practices in alignment with HWDSB’s strategic priorities.

B). Safe and Accessible Reporting:

Create confidential, accessible, and safe reporting systems for bullying incidents, with clear procedures for both victims and witnesses. These systems should encourage participation from parents, guardians, and staff, while prioritizing student well-being and dignity.

Action Example: HWDSB supports anonymous reporting methods such as tip lines (HWDSB Helps) and ombudspersons, and system navigator(s) to ensuring these systems are in line with the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan’s focus on accessibility and inclusivity.

C). Safety Plans for Victims:

Develop personalized safety plans for students who experience bullying, utilizing tools like PREVNet’s Bullying Identification and Intervention Tool, ensuring they reflect culturally relevant and anti-racist approaches.

Action Example: All Staff have training and are supported in the implementation of Student Safety planning, including resources for students and families that provide the ability to tailor interventions that focus on restoring student dignity and promoting healing.

D). Roles and Responsibilities:

Clearly define and communicate the roles of administrators and school staff in bullying prevention and intervention, incorporating human rights and equity principles. Provide practical case studies to guide responses that respect the dignity and rights of all students.

Action Example: Provide staff training with examples of equitable and inclusive responses to bullying, including bias-free progressive discipline and promoting the MYSP's focus on building positive, caring relationships.

E). Parental Involvement and Communication:

Establish communication guidelines that keep parents and guardians informed throughout the bullying reporting and response process, ensuring their input is sought and their privacy is respected.

Action Example: Resources and tools have been created and are in place to support schools and staff to regularly update parents on incidents of bullying and encourage their involvement in solution-oriented discussions, ensuring that communication is clear and respectful.

F). Documentation and Accountability:

Document bullying incidents and ensure they are recorded in student files, maintaining transparency and accountability, while protecting upstanders from punitive actions.

Action Example: Implement clear documentation protocols that ensure accountability for both victims and perpetrators, supporting the MYSP's goal of creating a supportive school culture where all students feel safe and valued.

G). Policy Autonomy and Flexibility:

Allow schools to tailor bullying responses based on the unique needs of their communities, in a way that aligns with a whole-school approach to student well-being and equity.

Action Example: HWDSB continues to support school leaders with tools, resources and personnel to develop responses that reflect the diverse needs of their students while ensuring alignment with HWDSB's commitment to equity, inclusion, and safe schools.

H). Equity and Inclusive Practices:

Review bullying prevention policies through an equity lens, ensuring that all responses are fair, educational, and developmental. This includes providing clear reintegration strategies for students suspended due to bullying and actively seeking feedback for continuous improvement.

Action Example: HWDSB continues to develop and support restorative practices where applicable, ensuring that disciplinary actions are progressive in nature, bias free and foster learning and personal growth in a manner that aligns with HWDSB's focus on human rights and equitable outcomes for every student.

3. Address Gaps in Staff Diversity and Inequities in Professional Outcomes:

HWDSB will implement a comprehensive plan to address gaps in staff diversity and inequities in professional outcomes at all levels of the board. This will be aligned with the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan and its goals of creating diverse, inclusive, and equitable educational environments for both students and staff.

Action Example: Turner Consulting Group Inc. was contracted in May 2019 by the HWDSB to conduct a Human Resources Equity Audit. This work was delayed twice, the first time as a result of job action and the second time as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic. The Equity Audit has served as the foundation for improved human resources practices and work environment in order to create a more diverse workforce, equitable policies and practices, and an inclusive workplace for all employees.

4. Formalize the Relationship Between HWDSB and the Police:

HWDSB will work with local law enforcement to ensure that there is a clear, formalized process for collaboration between the board and the police, particularly around issues of school safety and bullying prevention. This relationship will be grounded in principles of community safety and respect for student rights.

Action Example: HWDSB has reviewed (with 4 partner school boards) the Police/School Board Protocol using an Anti-Racist/Anti-Oppressive lens supportive of a Human Rights and “client-centered approach”. Currently, HWDSB supports schools in understanding roles and expectations regarding police involvement in school-based issues. Currently, the provincial framework for a police/school-board protocol is being reviewed and revised, which will have an impact on the local protocol revisions.

5. Create a Formalized Process for Periodic Policy Reviews:

HWDSB has a formalized process for the periodic review of policies and procedures that will be implemented. Policies are reviewed every three (3) years, unless requested earlier by Trustees. Feedback will be gathered from a wide range of stakeholders, including educators, school staff, principals, students, parents, guardians, caregivers, unions, and community partners in a variety of ways to maximize participation.

Action Example: Most recently, HWDSB’s Bullying Intervention and Prevention Policy, Human Rights and Equity Policy, Mental Health Strategy, Indigenous Education Circle Action Plan and Specialized Services Action Plan all completed a review. Input was received from a diverse group of students, parents/guardians/caregivers, staff and community through relevant surveys, focus groups, and school community meetings. HWDSB believes that this process has ensured that its policies remain relevant and responsive to the needs of all students and staff, particularly those from marginalized communities.

6. Align and Integrate Action Steps with HWDSB’s Human Rights and Equity Action Plan:

All of the above actions are consistently reviewed to ensure they are aligned with and integrated into the board’s Human Rights and Equity Action Plan, ensuring that equity and inclusion are central to all initiatives and activities.

Action Example: The steps for addressing staff diversity, reviewing policies, and engaging stakeholders will be woven into the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan to ensure that progress is tracked and that all activities contribute to broader equity goals. This will include integrating these action steps into the board’s strategic planning process, with regular monitoring and adjustments made based on data, feedback, and evolving needs.

In addition, HWDSB now utilizes a Human Rights Impact Assessment (HRIA) process for identifying and assessing potential unintended, adverse, and disproportional impacts (positive or negative) of a policy, program, procedure or initiative on the human rights enjoyment and/or educational access for students/ staff/ families/ communities.

The tool facilitates that any practice that may produce inequitable outcomes or has adverse human rights impact is identified, mitigated, and addressed proactively in accordance with the HWDSB Human Rights Policy A.1, the Equity and Inclusion 5.4 and Indigenous Education Policy (in development). The HRIA will be conducted when developing a new policy/ program/procedure and/or when reviewing/ evaluating existing policies, programs and procedures.

Even though the HRIA can be used for various kinds of projects (policies, procedures, programs, initiatives etc.), to avoid repetition, the rest of the document will only refer to policy development. The HRIA is developed based on the OHRC's Human Rights-Based Approach to Program and Policy Development Framework and adopted from a Health and Equity Assessment Tool (HEAT) by the Ontario Ministry of Health.

RECOMMENDATION 7

1. Establish a Review Process for Safe Schools Policies and Procedures:

While in place, the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Lead coordinated the development of a systematic review process to ensure that safe school's policies and procedures are applied consistently and effectively across HWDSB schools. This review focused on addressing inconsistencies and ineffective applications of policies, identifying areas where guidelines or codes of conduct may not be enforced appropriately.

Action Example: The review involved input from administrators, teachers, staff, and students. Data and feedback will be collected through surveys, focus groups, and interviews to identify gaps in policy implementation. The outcomes were used to update policies, in particular the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy, while ensuring alignment with best practices and equity principles.

2. Address the Unequal Application of Bullying Policies Based on Identity:

HWDSB's review of policies, procedures and practice as they relate to a revised Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy continues to include an examination of the disproportionate impact that bullying policies may have on students based on their identity (e.g., race, gender-identity, disability, sexual orientation). The process will ensure that any discriminatory patterns in the application of policies are identified and corrected.

Action Example: Aside from having included the voices of those identities not normally included in this work to the consultation process, HWDSB continues to revise methods of data collection on incidents of bullying to better include a breakdown by student identity (e.g., race, gender-identity, disability, etc.). Any disparities in how incidents are handled will be analyzed, and action plans will be developed to address these disparities. Equity training for staff continues to be a key component of addressing these issues.

3. Accountability and Transparency in Staff Protocols:

The review process will establish clear accountability mechanisms for staff who fail to follow bullying prevention protocols. It will also address abusive behaviour by staff towards students, colleagues, and parents.

Action Example: A reporting system has been implemented where students, staff, and parents can safely report concerns regarding staff behaviour and adherence to HWDSB and Human Rights and Equity protocols. These reports are reviewed by HWDSB's Ombudsperson, ensuring that any instances of misconduct are addressed transparently and appropriately. Staff found in violation of protocols will undergo retraining or other corrective actions, depending on the severity of the violation.

4. Support Progressive Discipline Decisions Regarding Bullying:

The review process will ensure that progressive discipline decisions made by principals are informed by current research and align with Ontario's Ministry of Education policies on suspension and expulsion. This will be particularly important in cases of bullying, where responses should consider the context and needs of the students involved.

Action Example: A decision-making framework based on PREVNet resources has been created, shared and in-serviced (annually) to guide principals in making consistent and fair decisions regarding bullying incidents. This framework will include restorative principles and offer strategies for addressing the root causes of bullying behaviors.

5. Clarify Information Sharing Protocols:

The review process will ensure that staff understand privacy obligations and are clear about what information can and cannot be shared regarding bullying incidents. This will be reflected in updated policies and procedures.

Action Example: Updated policies and procedures include detailed guidelines on confidentiality and information sharing in the context of bullying cases, ensuring staff are informed of their responsibilities in safeguarding student privacy while addressing incidents. These include direct reference to MFFIPA and other privacy requirements as outlined by the Ontario Privacy Commission and are reflected in HWDSB's Privacy Policy 1.6.

6. Consistent Messages about Staff Roles and Responsibilities:

Senior leadership, with input from unions, students, and educators, will develop clear, consistent messaging around staff roles and responsibilities regarding bullying prevention. This will include setting active supervision standards during non-instructional times, such as recess and lunch, to ensure all students are protected.

Action Example: A series of workshops and staff training sessions has been developed to share and discuss staff roles, including interrupting, bullying prevention and behaviours. The sessions heavily focus on creating conditions for learning, ensuring every student sees themselves in their learning and responding to bullying. By focusing on building these consistent expectations across all schools, staff are empowered to better understand their responsibility in preventing bullying and fostering a safe school environment.

7. Increase Uptake of Electronic Tools for Bullying Data:

The review process has explored how electronic tools can be more effectively used to capture student background information related to bullying. This will include ensuring that these tools are accessible, user-friendly, and can inform decision-making as students transition between schools.

Action Example: While HWDSB has continued to utilize its Student Information System, "PowerSchool", it has worked to develop different ways that student profiles related to bullying incidents are stored. Specifically, incidents are now recorded by "type" of bullying that has been reported, as well as a companion log note entered. This currently allows schools to search entries based on type of bullying and a summary of actions that had been done to support. This has allowed educators and administrators to track bullying incidents across multiple years and schools, ensuring that interventions have been appropriately targeted as students move through the system.

8. Explore the Feasibility of an Electronic Decision-Tree Resource:

HWDSB will continue to investigate the feasibility and costs associated with developing an electronic decision-tree resource and other intervention supports for educators and administrators based on PREVNet resources.

Action Example: While a draft digital tool has been created, the information and decision-making tree in it was incorporated into a single resource created to guide educators and administrators through a step-by-step process for addressing bullying, as well as other progressive discipline incidents. This guide incorporates best practices and evidence-based approaches, ensuring consistent decision-making aligned with the board's values.

9. Create an Independent Student Ombudsperson Position:

An independent student ombudsperson will be considered to serve as a point of contact for students, parents, and guardians who feel unsafe following the standard authority chain (teacher ⇒ principal ⇒ superintendent ⇒ trustee).

Action Example: HWDSB's ombudsperson provides a neutral space where students and families can voice their concerns about bullying incidents, including situations where they feel the school response has been inadequate. The ombudsperson will also help mediate disputes and ensure accountability in addressing bullying, as well as Human Rights and Equity concerns.

RECOMMENDATION 8

1. Prevention and Intervention that Acknowledges Every Child's Right to a Safe Education:

The bullying prevention and intervention framework will be built upon the foundation that every student has the right to an education free from violence and discrimination. This aligns with human rights principles and focuses on ensuring that every student can thrive in a supportive, caring school environment.

Action Example: The implementation of Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy, Procedure and associated resources continue to be rooted in HWDSB's intense focus on human rights education and the principles of equity at all levels. This has included the development of education programs and resources focused on the rights of every student, with particular attention to the diverse needs of historically underserved populations.

2. Establish Core Organizational Values and Operational Principles with Stakeholder Input:

Building a culture of caring and respect requires active involvement from students, parents, guardians, caregivers, and staff. By working together to co-create core organizational values and operational principles, HWDSB can ensure that its bullying prevention framework reflects the needs and aspirations of the entire school community.

Action Example: Development of HWDSB's recently launched Multi-Year Strategic Plan included wide consultation including:

- 1 Public Meeting with 100+ Participants
- 5 Youth-led Pop-ups
- 6 Community Pop-ups
- 7 Advisory Groups and Student Leadership Workshops
- 43 Interviews
- 3000 Survey Responses

Through this work, HWDSB created a 5-year plan for HWDSB with a powerful mission:

"To ensure that every student experiences a sense of belonging and engages in dynamic learning to reach their potential and build their own future".

As part of this launch, HWDSB shared its new tagline for the duration of this plan: **Be You. Be Excellent.** In addition, HWDSB's mission is underpinned by new guiding values – **Compassion, Dignity, Trust and Joy.**

Finally, HWDSB's new Strategic Directions: **Upholding Human Rights, Safety & Well-Being; Providing Equitable Quality Education; Collaborating with Students, Families & Communities; Building a Sustainable Education System; Reinforcing Indigenous Educational Wellness & Reconciliation.**

3. Establish Oversight and Accountability Structures:

To maintain the integrity of bullying prevention and intervention efforts, oversight structures must be established at the school, system, and community levels. These structures will ensure consistent application of policies and provide a means of accountability for all involved.

Action Example: Multiple Advisory Tables were created to monitor, evaluate and inform the implementation of bullying prevention efforts. These tables included representatives from the school board, community organizations, student councils, unions, and parent/caregiver/guardian organizations. The committee will oversee the effectiveness of policies, procedures, and resources to ensure that schools are better equipped to respond to bullying incidents promptly and fairly.

4. Incorporate Standardized Bullying Outcome Measures in the HWDSB Performance Monitoring Framework:

To assess the impact of bullying prevention and intervention strategies, it is crucial to incorporate consistent, standardized outcome measures that track progress over time. These measures will focus on key indicators of school climate, student safety, and the reduction of bullying incidents.

Action Example: Currently, HWDSB's performance monitoring framework focuses on school climate metrics that are reflected in data such as bullying prevalence rates, student engagement in anti-bullying initiatives, disciplinary outcomes, and the presence of supportive adult relationships. These data points are used by HWDSB at the system and school level to support improvement planning efforts, as well as to identify trends and inform future initiatives.

5. Establish Transparent and Timely Monitoring System for Reporting to the Board and the Community:

To ensure transparency and accountability in the implementation of bullying prevention efforts, a clear and timely monitoring system will be established for reporting on progress. This system will involve regular updates to the Board of Trustees and the broader community, ensuring that all stakeholders are informed and involved in the ongoing work to improve school climates.

Action Example: A climate report that includes the status of bullying prevention efforts will be shared with the Board of Trustees and the community. Where possible, the report will include disaggregated data on bullying incidents, success stories, areas for improvement, and recommendations for further actions. This report will also highlight the voices of students and parents, ensuring that the review process is inclusive and representative of the entire school community.

RECOMMENDATION 9

1. Identify and Build Upon Current Leadership Best Practices:

HWDSB continues to build upon current leadership best practices to further create a culture of caring and a positive school climate. Through its leadership strategy, system leadership supports models that empower leaders to actively engage with staff, students, and parents/caregivers/guardians in ways that promote trust, respect, and collaboration. Current leadership best practices in HWDSB are always assessed for their alignment with equity, student well-being, and inclusion, and expanded upon to further strengthen a school climate focused on positive relationships and a sense of belonging.

Action Example: Leverage existing leadership development programs to integrate relational leadership principles, ensuring that leaders at all levels are equipped with tools to build positive, inclusive, and nurturing environments for both staff and students. Continue to refine and utilize mentorship programs to model and reinforce these leadership practices.

2. Identify Leadership Competencies for a Whole-Child, Student-Centered, Nurturing Environment:

Leadership competencies that support a whole-child, student-centered, and nurturing environment continue to play a significant role in HWDSB's growth. Currently, these competencies are incorporated into leadership development programs to ensure that leaders can effectively support the needs of all students, including those from marginalized groups.

Action Example: Using the Ontario Leadership Framework, as well as HWDSB's Multi-Year Strategic Plan, HWDSB continues to refine a set of leadership competencies focused on creating environments that promote emotional intelligence, cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed practices, and collaborative decision-making. These competencies are integrated into leadership training, performance reviews, and selection criteria for new leaders to ensure alignment with the HWDSB values of Compassion, Dignity, Trust and Joy.

3. Leverage Opportunities to Reinforce Organizational Values and Culture Shift:

Reinforcing the organizational values described in HWDSB's Human Rights and Equity Action Plan, Mental Health Strategy, and Indigenous Education Circle Action Plan can foster a culture of caring and respect. Leadership plays a crucial role in promoting these values and guiding a culture shift toward more inclusive, equitable practices.

Action Example: Organizational values are highlighted in everything HWDSB does. Leadership communication, professional development, and day-to-day practices all utilize "Compassion, Dignity, Trust, and Joy" as a foundation. Leadership consistently models these when centering student decision-making opportunities, as well as daily in their interactions with staff, students, and families. Staff training that focuses on values-driven leadership, including strategies for addressing issues such as microaggressions, systemic inequities, and cultural safety continues to be led at the system and school levels.

4. Address, Monitor, and Report on Staff Diversity Gaps:

A critical component of fostering an inclusive school climate is addressing the gap in staff diversity at the senior leadership level and ensuring that leadership opportunities are equitable. Monitoring and reporting on the diversity of staff, particularly at senior levels, will help HWDSB create pathways for the career advancement of underrepresented groups.

Action Example: HWDSB will implement a comprehensive plan to address gaps in staff diversity and inequities in professional outcomes at all levels of the board. This will be aligned with the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan and its goals of creating diverse, inclusive, and equitable educational environments for both students and staff. As an initial response, Turner Consulting Group Inc. was contracted in May 2019 by the HWDSB to conduct a Human Resources Equity Audit. This work was delayed twice, the first time as a result of job action and the second time as a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

The Equity Audit has served as the foundation for improved human resources practices and work environment to create a more diverse workforce, equitable policies and practices, and an inclusive workplace for all employees. The next part of this important work will be to conduct regular staff diversity audits to track gaps in diversity at the leadership level, with a focus on turnover rates and promotion opportunities. In doing so, HWDSB can continue to develop and support targeted initiatives such as mentorship programs, leadership development tracks, and diversity hiring strategies that can increase diversity in leadership roles and foster an inclusive culture at all levels of the organization.

5. Establish Leadership Performance Outcomes for HWDSB Leadership Strategy:

Establishing clear and measurable leadership performance outcomes will allow HWDSB to evaluate the effectiveness of leadership development initiatives and ensure that leaders are meeting expectations for fostering a positive school climate and inclusive culture.

Action Example: HWDSB's Multi-Year Strategic plan supports identifying key performance outcomes related to student well-being, staff engagement, equity outcomes, and school climate improvements. As part of an oversight structure, these outcomes should be incorporated into school improvement planning, as well as performance assessments for school and district leaders, with a focus on their ability to create environments where students feel safe, valued, and empowered.

6. Consider Using an External Facilitator for the Board's Transformation Process:

To add credibility and authenticity to HWDSB's transformation process, an external facilitator could be brought in to guide the organizational shift toward more inclusive, equitable, and student-centered practices. This facilitator can provide an outside perspective, offer expertise, and help align stakeholders to a common vision.

Action Example: As part of its consultation, HWDSB received help from a team of strategic planning specialists and innovative thinkers to support the development of its new Multi Year Strategic Plan. Together, with teams from Groundswell, Saffy and I-Think, HWDSB students, staff, families and community members contributed voice throughout the planning and variety of engagement sessions. In addition, "Engage", an external consultant with experience in transformational leadership and organizational culture change to facilitate a strategic planning process, also supported throughout the process.

7. Recognize and Celebrate Great Relational Leadership Work:

Acknowledging and celebrating relational leadership within HWDSB will reinforce the importance of positive relationships in creating a healthy school culture. Celebrating leadership that supports student well-being, equity, and inclusive practices will set a model for others to follow.

Action Example: HWDSB regularly celebrates school and system leaders who have demonstrated excellence in relational leadership and fostering a positive school climate. Best practice recognizes leaders for their efforts in promoting student voice, collaborating with families/caregivers, and creating safe, inclusive environments for every student.

RECOMMENDATION 10

Strengthen Partnerships with Community Stakeholders

HWDSB remains committed to fostering a collaborative approach in creating safe and inclusive school environments. To effectively implement the bullying prevention and intervention strategies outlined in Recommendations #3 and #4, HWDSB leverages and continues to develop strong partnerships with community, ensuring a diverse range of voices inform our initiatives.

1. Co-create and Evaluate Anti-Bullying Initiatives:

By collaborating with community partners, HWDSB aims to develop, implement, and assess the effectiveness of its anti-bullying strategies to ensure they align with the needs of our diverse school communities.

Action Example: HWDSB regularly hosts community forums and focus groups in a variety of ways to gather ongoing feedback on current safe schools and bullying prevention measures, ensuring initiatives are culturally relevant and responsive to community needs.

2. Utilize Existing HWDSB Committees to Enhance Efforts:

HWDSB will continue to leverage structures such as Parent Councils, the Parent Involvement Committee (PIC), the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), Indigenous Education Councils, and Community Advisory Committees to support efforts aimed at improving school climate.

Action Example: HWDSB regularly engages these committees' policy and procedural consultations, as well as in annual reviews of school climate data, allowing families/caregivers and community members to contribute insights and recommendations for continuous improvement.

3. Establish an Independent Community Oversight Table:

To ensure accountability and transparency, HWDSB will establish a community-led oversight table with broad representation to monitor the implementation of Safe Schools Action Plan recommendations.

Action Example: To address this recommendation, a joint effort of two phases was undertaken by HWDSB and McMaster University. The first phase (2021-2022) involved a review to discern the existence of models overseeing bullying within K-12 education (Dulai et al, 2022). Following a lack of K-12 specific models for bullying, the second phase (2022-2023) included another review of oversight models from sectors beyond K-12 education, as well as interviews with stakeholders connected to bullying at HWDSB (i.e., students, parents/guardians/caregivers, individuals affiliated with community organizations, community advocates, and HWDSB staff). ([Appendix A](#))

4. Share Best Practices from Successful School-Community Collaborations:

Identifying schools that excel in community partnerships for bullying prevention, HWDSB will disseminate successful practices across the system to foster positive school climates in all of its buildings.

Action Example: Develop case studies highlighting effective community collaborations and organize learning sessions for schools to share strategies and tools.

5. Expand Partnerships with Community Organizations:

HWDSB is dedicated to enhancing its partnerships with community organizations to address specific needs related to bullying prevention, mental health, and student well-being.

Action Example: Establish MOUs with local agencies to bring specialized services like mental health support and anti-bullying workshops directly to schools, ensuring easy access for students and staff.

RECOMMENDATION 11

Ask the Ministry of Education for Support

HWDSB remains committed to creating safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments where every student feels valued. However, achieving these ambitious goals requires additional support from the Ministry of Education. By addressing gaps in resources, professional learning, and centralized support, HWDSB can more effectively implement the strategies outlined in its action plans and strategies.

1. Request for Sustained, Centralized Funding

While HWDSB has made strides through existing initiatives, there remains a critical need for long-term, stable funding dedicated to bullying prevention and associated positive school climate work. This includes appointing a Safe Schools Lead in each board to ensure consistent, evidence-based strategies that are aligned with HWDSB's emphasis on equity and student well-being.

2. Establishment of Long-Term Expertise and Support

Access to centralized expertise in bullying prevention and intervention is crucial for HWDSB to address systemic barriers and respond to student needs effectively. By leveraging the Human Rights and Equity Action Plan, the Ministry can help ensure that resources are deployed with a focus on cultural relevance, anti-racism, and inclusivity.

3. Continued Curriculum Updates on Social-Emotional Learning

HWDSB supports the Ministry's ongoing efforts to integrate social-emotional learning in the curriculum. However, there is a need for enhanced emphasis on compassion, cultural competence, and anti-racist education. Aligning these updates with HWDSB's action plans ensures that students are equipped with the skills needed to foster inclusive relationships and a sense of belonging.

4. Ongoing Professional Learning Opportunities

Consistent funding for professional development remains an essential component in order for staff to remain equipped with current, evidence-based practices in bullying prevention and safe schools. This training is integral to HWDSB's commitment to creating inclusive, equitable learning environments and supports HWDSB's Safe Schools Action Plan, as well as the broader goals of the Multi-Year Strategic Plan.

5. Enhanced Supervision During High-Risk Times

Data and feedback from HWDSB schools indicate that non-instructional times, such as recess and lunch, continue to present higher risks for bullying incidents. Additional resources for increased supervision during these periods, potentially through community partnerships, would enhance student safety and align with HWDSB's goal of prioritizing student well-being.

SUMMARY










Building on the insights from the 2021-2023 Safe Schools Action Plan, the 2024-2027 Safe Schools Action Plan continues to prioritize Identity, Equity, and Human Rights as key elements of creating inclusive, safe, and supportive learning environments. This approach recognizes the importance of relationships and partnerships, reflected through the Two Row Wampum, which emphasizes mutual respect and shared responsibility. The plan affirms the significance of diverse voices and identities, aiming to foster a sense of belonging for all students while acknowledging the vital role that each community plays in supporting and maintaining human rights and promoting equity.

Guided by HWDSB’s Multi-Year Strategic Plan, this framework also integrates the Equity Action Plan, Specialized Services Action Plan, Mental Health Strategy, and Indigenous Education Circle Action Plan, creating a collective support system rooted in strong, collaborative relationships. By fostering shared responsibility across these initiatives, we aim to build a positive school climate that nurtures every student’s well-being and potential. Through this collaborative effort, HWDSB aims to ensure that every student experiences a sense of belonging and engages in dynamic, inclusive learning environments that empower them to thrive, reach their full potential, and build their own future.









PERCENTAGE OF RECOMMENDATIONS COMPLETED AND ONGOING	97%
PERCENTAGE OF RECOMMENDATIONS IN DEVELOPMENT (YET TO BE COMPLETED)	3%

RECOMMENDATION #1 - ACTIONS STEPS

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










Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
1. Involve students in the co-creation, implementation and evaluation of all HWDSB bullying prevention and intervention activities and initiatives at the school and system levels, including reviewing and updating related policies and procedures. (Phase 1 – student voice structure established)			
2. Build on HWDSBs 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 the 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. This includes asking student victims to identify what solutions they want to see put into place.			
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. Co-develop these strategies with students and potentially with community partners.			
6. Within the context of a whole-school approach, develop interactive resources that provide students with concrete examples and scripts for being an ally or bullying upstander. Develop these with students. For examples, see WITS Program's Bystander Quiz and PREVNet's What Kids Need to Know resources.			
7. Have students from Grades 4-12 participate as leaders on existing school improvement teams. With student input, reflect on the process, including criteria, for selecting student reps to ensure a range of identities are offered the opportunity to participate, especially those whose cultural, racial, faith, sexual, gender, ability or other identity is outside of the dominant socia-cultural norms. Clearly outline student roles and contributions as well as the mechanisms that will be put into place. Collect age-appropriate data from younger children, for example, by asking them how they feel in school.			

Recommendation #1 - Actions Steps (continued)

Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
8. Ensure all student-led activities and processes are implemented with appropriate adult allyship. Provide training in the importance of adult support and what constitutes an effective adult ally to educators, other school staff and school volunteers such as volunteer coaches.			
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. Important given the HWDSB Safe School Survey findings that indicate bullying tends to happen among groups of students who are involved in all three roles and who struggle with the same developmental, safety and relationship issues.			
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. (Phase 1 – student voice structure established)			
Total Recommendations: 11	11	11	1
Percentage of Recommendations Completed and Ongoing			100%
Percentage of Recommendations in Development (yet to be completed)			0%

RECOMMENDATION #2 - ACTIONS STEPS

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












Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
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. Suggested resources: PREVNet, WITS, and Fourth R. websites.			
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. Should including seeking feedback on bullying reporting and response processes from parents, guardians and caregivers, including those whose children have been involved in bullying in any role.			
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.			
Total Recommendations: 5	5	4	
Percentage of Recommendations Completed and Ongoing			100%
Percentage of Recommendations in Development (yet to be completed)			0%

RECOMMENDATION #3 - ACTION STEPS

Develop multi-tiered supports and programming.

Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
1. Establish a bullying prevention and intervention lead position at the board. Will lead system-level content and process efforts to create a culture of caring. Accountability shared with Executive Council.			
2. Create Board-wide framework that establishes overarching expectations and procedures for a multi-tiered system of supports and programming including:			
a. Supports at three levels, leveraging universal, selective and indicated programs and activities (examples provided within report pages 69-70).			
b. Broad, representative student involvement to guide the selection of supports and co-create activities, initiatives and solutions at both the school level and individual incident level.			
c. Engagement of key stakeholder groups in the development and implementation process. Identify and recognize the bullying prevention and intervention expertise within the Hamilton community.			
d. Application of an intersectional lens to bullying prevention and intervention. Consider a student's multiple identity layers and the role of social and structural inequities. Recognize and work to remedy interlocking systems of oppression. Seek opportunities to align with other well-being initiatives, including Equity Action Plan, Indigenous Education and Indigenous Cultural Safety, Mental health, special education and other safe schools activities.			
e. Continue with existing practices that were identified as important and successful during the community consultations - including restorative approaches, TipOff, HWDSB Helps and We Help campaign.			
3. Support students involved in bullying. Ensure selective and indicated supports, including mental health supports and other professional assistance, are made available to students who have been bullied or who have witnessed bullying. Ensure students who have engaged in bullying also receive appropriate supports. For example, continue to support the implementation and evaluation of the Nurturing Safer Schools: A Social Work Intervention pilot project in Grades 6 to 8. Expand the program's availability beyond the pilot sites if warranted by evaluation findings.			

Recommendation #3 - Actions Steps (continued)

Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
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. (see Recommendation #4).			
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. This data should be supplied at regular intervals to the dedicated lead position and annually to the board of trustees. Encourage full participation in School Climate Surveys and share results with students, parents, guardians, caregivers and the general public.			
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. For example, create a peer review team that reviews and provides guidance and feedback on school bullying prevention and intervention plans and shares what has worked well at other schools in the spirit of continuous quality improvement. This team's work should be guided by the board's dedicated lead position.			
Total Recommendations: 13	13	11	
Percentage of Recommendations Completed and Ongoing			100%
Percentage of Recommendations in Development (yet to be completed)			0%

RECOMMENDATION #4 - ACTION STEPS


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

Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
<p>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.</p>			
<p>2. Immediately explore alternative sources of additional adult supervision outside of the classroom during non- instructional time. Options include parent volunteers; lunch buddy mentoring approaches (see Gregus et al., 2015 as one example); and staff from local recreation programs and youth- serving agencies, starting with the agencies already providing before and after school programming within schools. These alternative adult supervisors could offer unstructured opportunities to connect during recess as well as an additional caring adult in the hallways during breaks. Ensure these supervisors are involved in the co-creation of the role and expectations and are adequately trained in bullying prevention and intervention, as well as related school protocols and codes of conduct.</p>			
<p>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. Direct more resources to schools with the greatest needs based primarily on a review of School Climate Survey results, particularly bullying prevalence, and principal reports. Key components of a whole-school approach include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Capacity and resources at the school level. These should be sufficient to coordinate the safe school team as well as build new and strengthen existing school-level partnerships with local community groups, programs and service providers (Phase 1 – structures) b. Ongoing, interactive education for all students and staff offered at least annually. Cover types of bullying; the difference between bullying, aggression and teasing; the impact of bullying; and how to respond to bullying, including specific examples. Material should acknowledge that bullying occurs between students, between staff and students, and between staff members. Incorporate role-playing scenarios and provide scripts for intervening in a positive way, for example, as a bullying upstander. Educational resources should be shared broadly with all school staff, including non-teaching staff, administrators, custodial staff, bus drivers and crossing guards, as well as parents, guardians and caregivers. 			 

Recommendation #4 - Actions Steps (continued)






Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
c. Essential structures and processes. These should support building and strengthening school-level partnerships with those who share a common interest in addressing bullying. Should use outside expertise and resources; augment existing safe school teams with student, parent, educator and community representation; identify a leader or leaders within the school administration; and integrate bullying prevention into classroom learning curriculum.			
d. Assessment. Suggestions include conducting an environmental scan of bullying frequency, including when and where bullying happens in a school; collecting and using school-level, disaggregated data to identify at-risk situations and students in ways that assure the confidentiality of those involved; and completing a bullying prevention needs assessment.			
e. School-level prevention and intervention. Each school plan should include a range of developmentally attuned and effective bullying prevention and intervention activities and approaches. These should be tailored to the school's needs by matching the level of risk to the level of intervention. They should also draw from the multi- tiered system of programming and supports discussed in Recommendation #3.			
f. Communication and evaluation of the school plan. Share the school's plan with all school stakeholders, including students, parents, guardians, caregivers, staff, unions and community partners. Evaluate how school initiatives are regarded by students, staff, parents, guardians and caregivers at least annually and make adjustments accordingly. Evaluations should incorporate standardized school level data collection and analysis on key bullying indicators, such as bullying prevalence, school belonging and caring adults.			
4. Ensure student voices are sought out and incorporated into the school's response to incidents of bullying. This includes asking student victims to identify the solutions they want to see implemented. (duplicate)			
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. This assistance should be offered to parents, guardians and caregivers whose children have been bullied, witnessed bullying and engaged in bullying, as well as to those who are concerned about bullying.			

Recommendation #4 - Actions Steps (continued)

Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
7. Establish consistent funding for ongoing board wide professional learning opportunities for educators on bullying prevention and intervention. Examples include education and coaching to address complex peer interactions and challenging students; concrete, specific and effective strategies for early detection and intervention; forms of power abuse, whether by students, educators or parents, guardians and caregivers, and the forms of protection needed within classrooms and schools; and learning about educator roles and responsibilities for reporting bullying. Ensure the professional learning plan establishes and evaluates measurable outcomes. Use what is learned from past professional learning opportunities to select, develop and implement subsequent opportunities.			
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. Include non-teaching staff, administrators, janitors, bus drivers and crossing guards. Consider creating an online code of conduct for all staff that is specific to bullying prevention and intervention.			
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. Plans should align closely with other student well-being activities at the school-level, including those connected to the Equity Action Plan, Indigenous Education and Indigenous Cultural Safety, mental health, special education and other safe schools initiatives.			
Total Recommendations: 16	15	16	1
Percentage of Recommendations Completed and Ongoing			100%
Percentage of Recommendations in Development (yet to be completed)			0%

RECOMMENDATION #5 - ACTION STEPS

Examine special education practices from a student-centred learning perspective











Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
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. Examples include developmental strategies, staffing levels and activities that foster students' empathy and support of peers.			
Total Recommendations: 5		5	
Percentage of Recommendations Completed and Ongoing			100%
Percentage of Recommendations in Development (yet to be completed)			0%

RECOMMENDATION #6 - ACTION STEPS








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

Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
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. Specific suggestions include:			
a. Using a consistent and comprehensive definition of bullying and the ways in which it can take place, including appropriate and inappropriate use of technology and social media. Ensure racist bullying, particularly micro aggressions, is explicitly defined.			
b. Ensuring those connected with schools, including students, educators, other school staff and volunteers clearly understand their obligations to not participate in bullying and the expectations if they witness bullying or related conduct, including the misuse of social media to further demean the person bullied.			
c. Ensuring students can report incidents of bullying in a safe, welcoming and accessible way that is both efficient and minimizes the possibility of reprisals. Reporting procedures must apply to victims of bullying and those who witness bullying. They must encourage parents, guardians, caregivers, teachers, coaches and other staff to report incidents of bullying. Examples include anonymous tip phone numbers, anonymous letter templates, and an independent student ombudsperson who listens to complaints and provides protection for and advice to students affected by misconduct and harassment.			
d. Creating and documenting a student safety plan for the student experiencing bullying victimization when high-risk bullying involvement is reported. An example is PREVNet's Bullying Identification and Intervention Tool.			
e. Clearly articulating and widely sharing the role played by each administrator and school staff member in bullying prevention and intervention. Include practical examples or case studies to illustrate how to respond in different situations and help distinguish bullying from other behaviours. PREVNet's tip sheet for differentiating between bullying, aggression and teasing is an example.			

Recommendation #6 - Actions Steps (continued)

Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
f. Creating clear communication guidelines and expectations for reporting and response that ensure parents, guardians and caregivers (especially those connected to the victims) are kept informed at every step of the bullying reporting and response process. This includes notifying them at the time of a reported bullying incident (or even earlier when concerning behaviours are identified), seeking their input with respect to an appropriate response, and communicating the outcome in a way that maintains privacy.			
g. Documenting bullying incidents, for example, in an education file, so they are on record for the student victim as well as the student or school adult who bullied.			
h. Ensuring existing policies and guidelines do not punish student upstanders for intervening and trying to help.			
i. Providing schools with sufficient autonomy and flexibility to respond to the needs of their students and school community within the context of a whole- school approach (see Recommendation #4).			
j. Ensuring each school has a full checklist of existing policies, guidelines, statutory duties and responsibilities and ensuring, in a systemic way, that staff, including temporary staff, are trained on them all.			
k. Examining policies, guidelines and current practices related to progressive discipline through an equity lens, as well as according to inclusive education and human rights principles (Ontario Ministry of Education & Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013). This examination should also take into consideration the concerns regarding discipline that were shared during this review and the need to provide clarity and consistency regarding how, when and for whom discipline is imposed. The consequences need to be educational or developmental to ensure that students are learning and developing optimally. Furthermore, when a student is suspended as a result of a bullying incident, there should be an articulated and shared re- integration strategy to promote healing and the student's positive development. HWDSB should monitor disciplinary outcomes, check in with involved students and their parents, guardians and caregivers, and seek feedback to improve protocol and process as needed.			

Recommendation #6 - Actions Steps (continued)









Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
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. Examples of inequities in professional outcomes include higher turnover rates and fewer opportunities for promotion experienced by diverse staff.			
	(See previous page for entry)		
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. This review should take place every two years as per Ministry requirements and more frequently as improvement opportunities arise.			
6. Align and integrate the above action steps with HWDSB's Equity Action Plan where appropriate.			
Total Recommendations: 16	15	15	1
Percentage of Recommendations Completed and Ongoing			94%
Percentage of Recommendations in Development (yet to be completed)			6%

RECOMMENDATION #7 - ACTION STEPS

Ensure policies and procedures are followed consistently











Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
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. The lead should establish clear timelines and accountabilities for any review committee.			
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. Policies and procedures should ensure that teachers, parents, guardians, caregivers and, where appropriate, other staff who regularly interact with students are not unnecessarily left "in the dark" about a student's involvement in a bullying incident, whether alleged or proven, and the outcome of the response. Such an understanding is consistent with the need to protect a student's privacy and prevent unnecessary disclosure.			
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. Consider union representatives as allies in the process and seek their assistance in providing consistent messages and sharing resources with their members. (Phase 1 – Union engagement structures)			

Recommendation #7 - Actions Steps (continued)

Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
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. These tools can be used for reporting bullying incidents (for example, the digital safe schools infraction reporting tool), and capturing student log notes (such as the Student Information System). This may require developing documentation standards and protocols in partnership with educators and administrators.			
8. Explore the feasibility of and costs associated with developing an electronic decision-tree resource for educators and school administrators based on PREVNet resources. This resource will guide the user through standardized bullying assessment, intervention and response protocols, including assessment questions and scripts; suggested response options to match the level of risk; and suggested next steps, including reporting and follow up requirements. Involve educators and school administrators in identifying user needs and system requirements. Consider developing a business case and seeking Ministry of Education funding for its development and implementation across school boards, with HWDSB serving as a pilot site.			
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. The ombudsperson would report to senior leadership and could be affiliated with HWDSB's Human Rights and Equity office.			
10. Create a formal process for periodic review at multiple levels with a public accountability component. This review should include an examination of the overall procedures being implemented to ensure they effectively fulfill their intended purpose without creating bureaucratic gridlock.			
Total Recommendations: 10	10	8	1
Percentage of Recommendations Completed and Ongoing			100%
Percentage of Recommendations in Development (yet to be completed)			0%















RECOMMENDATION #8 - ACTION STEPS

Set the foundation for a culture of caring

Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
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. The commitment statement should state that identifying and removing discriminatory biases and systemic barriers at all levels are key activities to support positive school climates and decrease bullying.			
2. Establish, with input from students, parents, guardians, caregivers and staff, a set of core organizational values and operational principles will ensure a culture of caring and respect.			
3. Establish oversight and accountability structures at the school, system/HWDSB, governance and community levels. Build on existing, aligned structures where appropriate and indicate where new structures are needed. Structures should be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> School level: for example, revitalized school climate teams with refreshed expectations. HWDSB system-level: for example, a system-level steering committee charged with overseeing the implementation of review panel recommendations, with broad membership that includes students, parents, educators, unions and community partner representatives, plus at least one community advocacy group specifically focused on bullying. Consider a student and/or advocacy group co-chair. Governance level: for example, a sub-committee aligned with current strategic directions. Community level: for example, a community-led group (see Recommendation #10-3). 			
4. Incorporate consistent, standardized bullying outcome measures in the HWDSB performance monitoring framework. Examples of measures are bullying prevalence, demographic characteristics of students who are bullied, school belonging, caring adults and student voice.			
5. Establish a transparent, timely monitoring system for reporting to the Board of Trustees and the broader community on HWDSB's bullying prevention and intervention efforts. This should be created in partnership with the review panel external advisors. Include targets and measures at the school and system level that are tracked between School Climate Survey cycles to ensure HWDSB knows where it is making progress and where it needs to improve.			
Total Recommendations: 5	5	4	1
Percentage of Recommendations Completed and Ongoing			100%
Percentage of Recommendations in Development (yet to be completed)			0%

RECOMMENDATION #9 - ACTION STEPS

Strengthen the leadership skills needed for culture change




Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
1. Identify and build upon current leadership best practices to create a culture of caring and positive school climate within HWDSB. Establish systems and processes to continuously spread these practices throughout the whole organization, for example, professional learning communities.			
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. Examples include relational leadership, facilitation, coaching, integrated thinking and a continuous quality improvement mindset.			
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. Then, using a model of continuous improvement, deliver training and support, monitor practice and measure to see if these outcomes have been achieved.			
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.			
Total Recommendations: 7	7	6	1
Percentage of Recommendations Completed and Ongoing			100%
Percentage of Recommendations in Development (yet to be completed)			0%

RECOMMENDATION #10 - ACTION STEPS

Work with a wide range of community partners






Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
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. This action will reinforce HWDSB's strategic direction on Partnerships and enhance the range of bullying prevention and intervention resources and expertise available to students.			
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. This entity should also identify and address barriers to school-community working relationships that are specific to bullying prevention and intervention and overall student well-being. Ensure the entity's terms of reference give it moral authority for and public recognition of its oversight role without impinging on the board's authority. Consider building upon existing community structures that bring together a range of partners to address the health and well-being of children and youth in Hamilton.			
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. Examples include:			
a. Developing or enhancing an alternative suspension program with local youth-serving organizations.			
b. Re-examining the use of restorative practices with local youth justice organizations.			
c. Participating in the co-creation of educational curriculum, for example through the City of Hamilton's Hate Prevention and Mitigation Initiative.			
d. Partnering with local recreation and children/youth-serving organizations to provide additional adult supervision during non-instructional time such as recess, lunch breaks and in hallways. Start with the organizations and programs already providing school-based programming before and after school.			
e. Continuing to participate in and contribute to Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan at both the strategic and operational levels.			

Recommendation #10 - Actions Steps (continued)

Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
6. Share strategies and experiences related to bullying prevention and intervention with the four local school boards.			
7. Assess, monitor and evaluate investments in bullying intervention and prevention programs in partnership with academics to improve programs and continuously align them with the recommendations in this report.			
Total Recommendations: 11	10	7	2
Percentage of Recommendations Completed and Ongoing			91%
Percentage of Recommendations in Development (yet to be completed)			9%

RECOMMENDATION #11 - ACTION STEPS

Ask the Ministry of Education for support

Recommended Actions Steps (Summarized)	Completed	Ongoing	Developing
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. This could include guidance documents, standardized tools for school climate and supports for data analysis and interpretation.			
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. This could include citizenship education and 21st century skills.			
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.			
Total Recommendations: 5	5		
Percentage of Recommendations Completed and Ongoing			100%
Percentage of Recommendations in Development (yet to be completed)			0%

APPENDIX A

Safe Schools Recommendation 10.3 in 2023 Executive Summary

Background

Following the tragic passing of a fourteen-year-old student in 2019, [the Safe Schools Action Plan 201–2023](#) was created with the aspiration to prevent further similar incidents. Specifically, Recommendation 10.3 of the Action Plan calls for the establishment of “a community-led, independent table with broad representation, including from HWDSB, to oversee implementation of review panel recommendations at the highest level.”

To address this recommendation, a joint effort of two phases was undertaken by HWDSB and McMaster University. The first phase (2021-2022) involved a review to discern the existence of models overseeing bullying within K-12 education (Dulai et al, 2022). Following a lack of K-12 specific models for bullying, the second phase (2022-2023) included another review of oversight models from sectors beyond K-12 education, as well as interviews with stakeholders connected to bullying at HWDSB (i.e., students, parents/guardians/caregivers, individuals affiliated with community organizations, community advocates, and HWDSB staff).

Phase Two Findings

Participants expressed general agreement on the necessity of recommendation 10.3, as well as Safe Schools more broadly. Key themes from the literature and interviews consisted of the following categories:

1. The importance of determining the oversight’s form before its function, including clearly defining the oversight’s objectives, the board and community’s co-development of the oversight, as well as stakeholder buy-in through sufficient resources and building capacity for new ways of partnering.
2. Design considerations for the oversight, including stakeholder involvement, oversight format, task delineation, and meeting logistics.
3. Operational considerations for the oversight, including decision-making, member dynamics, and strategies to enhance attendance and engagement (in particular, taking lessons from prior Safe Schools work to enhance communication).

Next Steps

The literature and interviews revealed the importance of having a dedicated team for recommendation 10.3, not to mention Safe Schools. This may involve coordination across existing HWDSB teams and/or hiring external community consultants, given bullying is an issue with roots and impacts both within schools (e.g., mental health, academics, etc.) and beyond (e.g., public health, social services, etc.) (Craig & Edge, 2012). Therefore, the team recognizes the importance of developing recommendation 10.3 through reciprocal collaboration between HWDSB, the community, and stakeholders beyond education (Cornu et al., 2022).

In line with HWDSB’s 2023-2028 Strategic Directions, we emphasize that the success of Safe Schools relies upon a well-supported, whole city approach in order to create safer and inclusive spaces of learning for our students and children, both inside and outside of the classroom.

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Safe Schools Action Plan Recommendation 10.3 in 2023

**Izzah Khairi, Avery Rhind, Jiwon Hwang, Jennifer Pearson,
Margaret Secord**

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We would also like to thank our research participants for their willingness to share their experiences and expertise on an issue that is personal and important. You have provided us with a deeper understanding of the complexities around developing oversight for HWDSB's anti-bullying plan. This gratitude extends to the wider Hamilton community involved. Your commitment to confronting the substantial and complex issue of bullying is genuinely inspiring and has been a driving force behind this study. We sincerely hope that what we have learned here will encourage future learnings around how Hamilton can come together to take action against bullying.

Executive Summary

In 2021, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) created their [Safe Schools Action Plan 2021–2023](#) based on the Safe Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel’s recommendations. While many recommendations are currently being implemented by HWDSB, the focus of this report is on recommendation 10.3, which calls for the establishment of “a community-led, independent table with broad representation, including from HWDSB, to oversee implementation of review panel recommendations at the highest level.”

Over the past two years, there have been significant changes in the landscape of schools and the education system; namely, the COVID-19 pandemic. However, progress has also been made within Safe Schools work itself through the development of Advisories (Student, Parent, Community, and Organization), as well as working groups (Healthy Relationships, Policy & Procedure, Where Bullying Happens/Supervision, Responding, School Improvement Planning) that did not exist when the Action Plan was first released. These groups have allowed for continued learning within Safe Schools. It was during this period that a team from HWDSB and McMaster University conducted a literature review of oversight structures to address bullying (Dulai et al, 2022). From this review, it was identified that further research needed to be conducted to determine other oversight models from sectors and jurisdictions beyond K-12 education, as well as to elucidate the community’s perspectives on oversight for Safe Schools.

Accordingly, in the second phase of the project in 2022-2023, the team from HWDSB and McMaster conducted a follow-up literature review of additional models, as well as performed interviews and focus groups with individuals currently connected to HWDSB (e.g., students, parents/guardians/caregivers, individuals affiliated with community organizations, community advocates, and HWDSB staff) in order to identify key elements that would be the most applicable to recommendation 10.3. General findings from the literature review included models of oversight, as well as monitoring and evaluation used in the sectors of education, nonprofits, policing, and more. In conjunction with this review, the interviews aimed to assess whether recommendation 10.3 was needed or helpful from the perspectives of participants, with which the majority of individuals agreed.

A thematic analysis of the primary (interviews) and secondary (literature review) research was performed to better understand how findings from the literature review may support, contradict, or complement the findings of the interviews, and vice versa. As the themes identified within the literature review were overall present in the themes from the interviews, the secondary research was used to support findings from the primary research, as opposed to being reported individually. A summary of the amalgamated themes is as follows.

Form before function (pre-work to consider the purpose(s) of oversight for Safe Schools, along with certain conditions that may increase the likelihood of successfully achieving the aforementioned purpose(s)).

- **Why have oversight for Safe Schools:** including the original intention of independent accountability, having the oversight be oriented towards action, balancing opposing timelines of acting promptly while being considerate of the fact that work still needs to be carefully planned, and the role of oversight within Safe Schools work in general
- **Co-development of the recommendation:** board and community coming together to determine shared definitions, agreed-upon boundaries within which the oversight can operate and what power it might have
- **Importance of ensuring buy-in:** recognizing the value in providing resources and funding despite competing demands, as well as putting in time and effort to learn how to engage in partnership with each other

Design considerations (considerations for the “who,” “what,” “when,” and “where” of the oversight’s design).

- Considering who might be involved: engaging relevant stakeholders and the logistics of their involvement (i.e., recruitment, compensation, length of involvement, group size), as well as a key component of having a well-resourced backbone team

- Considering what the oversight’s format might look like: participants’ preliminary ideas of how the oversight may be structured
- Considering what tasks the oversight might undertake: checking in on progress and process, monitoring of the oversight itself, and also how the general public may be involved and kept informed
- Considering when meetings might take place: including appropriate meeting frequency and time of day when meetings may occur
- Considering where meetings might be held: format (i.e., in-person, virtual, hybrid) and location

Operational considerations (considerations for “how” the oversight might operate).

- **Considering how decisions might be made:** decision-making styles and the role of data
- **Considering how might members interact with each other:** working in collaboration and building relationships between members
- **Considering how to encourage member attendance and engagement:** key conditions including timely and transparent communication, finding mutual times to meet, visibility of recommendation 10.3 and/or Safe Schools with the broader public, and accessibility with regards to language and technology

As bullying is an issue with roots and impacts beyond the scope of schools, the team recognizes the importance of approaching and developing recommendation 10.3 that involves stakeholders at the board and in the community, along with engagement beyond the sector of education (Cornu et al., 2022; Facts & solutions, n.d.). In creating safer and belonging spaces of learning for our students and children, this work can only truly be successful through the lens of a “whole city” approach, with collaborators across Hamilton joining together to tackle this deeply harmful and persistent issue.

1. Introduction

In 2021, the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) released [the Safe Schools Action Plan 2021–2023](#) in response to the death of Devan Bracci-Selvey, a 14-year-old student who was the victim of a bullying-related incident while attending Winston Churchill Secondary School. The recommendations in the Action Plan were informed by extensive community consultations conducted by the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel, a group of experts from the Hamilton community (Dr. Jean Clinton, Brenda Flaherty, and Dr. Gary Warner). The Action Plan, which is connected to HWDSB's Positive Culture and Well-Being strategic priority for 2022, outlines 11 broad recommendations that address one of the following categories: students, parents/guardians/caregivers, schools, HWDSB at a system level, the Hamilton community, and the Ministry of Education. Each recommendation for Safe Schools has multiple phases that are currently in progress by HWDSB at various stages of implementation.

Recommendation 10 is categorized under the collaboration between HWDSB and community. The first phase of this recommendation, numbered 10.3, stipulates the following:

“Establish a community-led, independent table with broad representation, including from HWDSB, to oversee implementation of review panel recommendations at the highest level. This entity should also identify and address barriers to school-community working relationships that are specific to bullying prevention and intervention and overall student well-being. Ensure the entity’s terms of reference give it moral authority for and public recognition of its oversight role without impinging on the board’s authority. Consider building upon existing community structures that bring together a range of partners to address the health and well-being of children and youth in Hamilton.”

To explore how this recommendation may be put into action, HWDSB collaborated with the Child Health Specialization of the Bachelor of Health Sciences program at McMaster University to research this subject area. In 2021-2022, a literature review of oversight structures related to K-12 education and bullying was conducted (Dulai et al., 2022). The report revealed a lack of formal oversight related to anti-bullying programming and initiatives in schools; however, it was also able to provide key elements and considerations for the implementation of an oversight structure, including organizational features, communication, amplification of voices, group composition, measurement systems, training, monitoring, and anticipated challenges.

Since Dulai et al.'s review covered oversight models exclusive to the K-12 school context, an identified research gap was oversight extending beyond K-12 environments. In addition, there was a recognition of the opportunity to investigate the Hamilton community's perception of oversight for Safe Schools.

With these objectives in consideration, a follow-up study was conducted in 2022-2023 consisting of two components:

- a literature review of oversight models including and beyond K-12 education
- interviews of Hamilton community members and HWDSB staff

2. Methodology

2.1 Literature review

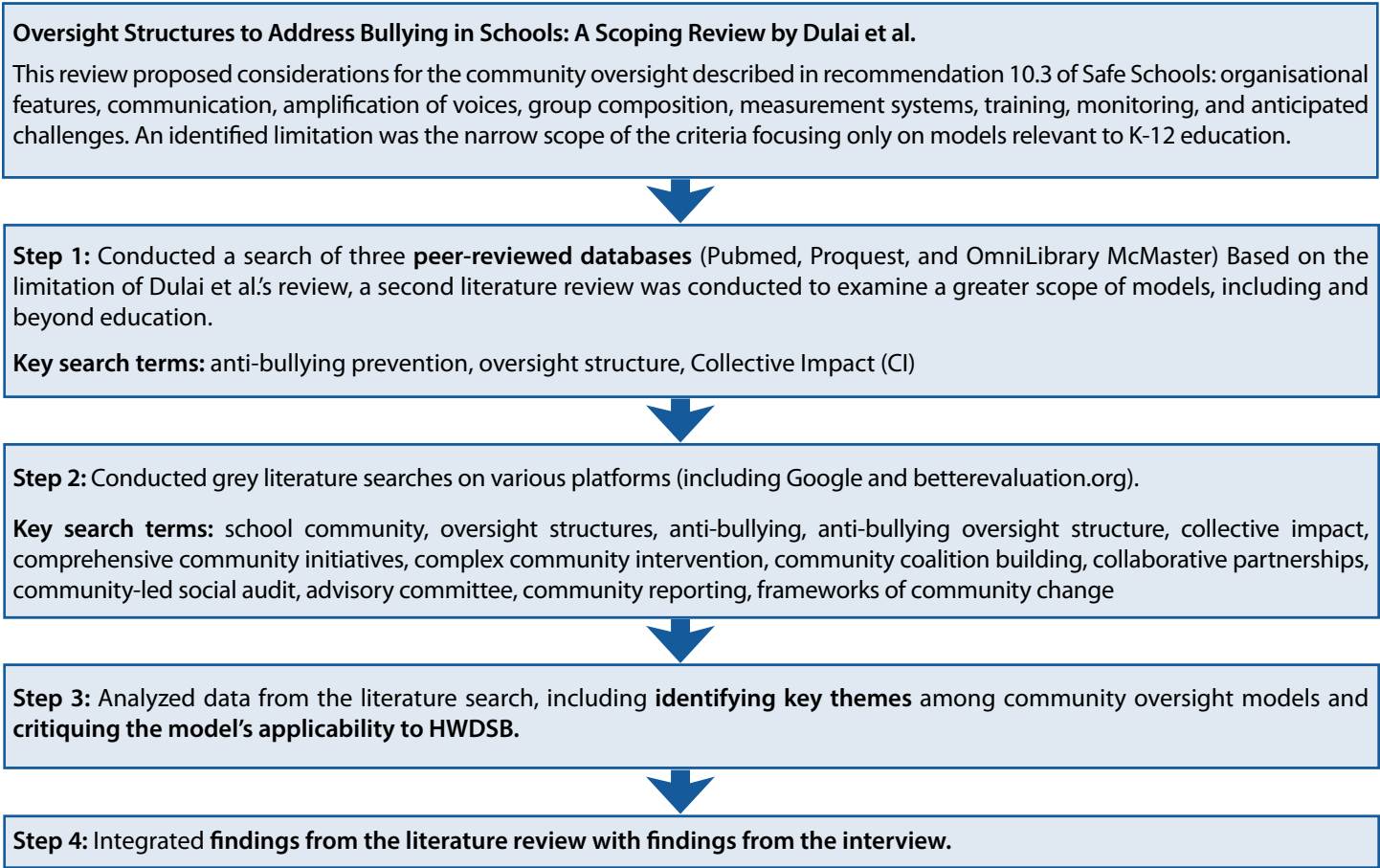
The literature review was conducted by Jiwon Hwang and Avery Rhind during the months of January through April 2023. Initially, searches were run through peer-reviewed databases; however, given the nature of the research topic, few results were deemed relevant, and therefore the search strategy was broadened to include grey literature, which is information not from traditional or academic publishing. As well, based on Dulai et al.'s suggested future directions, some searches were based around collective impact (CI) (a known model of community work) and its limitations, revealing some models as reported in section 3 of this report.

Grey literature was searched using Google and betterevaluation.org with the search terms described in Figure 1, which were primarily based on the terms used by Dulai et al. to conduct the previous literature review on this topic. Moreover, some terms were developed through consultation with librarians at McMaster University, recommended by colleagues and supervisors, or developed by Jiwon Hwang and Avery Rhind.

When conducting searches on Google, the date and time of the search was recorded, and the first 20 results were examined due to time and resource constraints. Sources deemed relevant to the research topic were explored in greater detail, and detailed notes of the contents of the source were recorded. No specific exclusion or inclusion criteria was utilized, as it was discussed and agreed upon by the research team that relevant insights on community-based oversight may not be directly linked to any specific location, time, or setting of a model. However, discussions amongst the research team, as well as based on Dulai et al.'s work in the preceding year, guided the researchers to determine relevant models for the report.

Following collection of relevant models, each source was reviewed again to ensure they remained relevant to the research question. A thematic analysis was conducted, wherein main ideas were extracted from each source and commonalities between ideas were established. This analysis process of the literature review was done independently of the analysis of the interviews to mitigate any influences that the latter would have on the results of the review. A total of eight themes based on commonality among sources were compiled (see Appendix A). Stark differences in ideas between sources were also evaluated, as well as notable, distinct ideas.

Figure 1. Literature review methodology, including key terms.



2.2 Interviews and focus groups

Concurrent to the literature review was primary research of semi-structured interviews and focus groups (both henceforth referred to as “interviews”) facilitated by Izzah Khairi. Participants included students, parents/guardians/caregivers (henceforth termed “parents”), individuals affiliated with community organizations, community advocates, and HWDSB staff, and are categorised as such in this report. It must be acknowledged, however, that while participant identities have been simplified to one demographic for the purposes of this report, individuals often crossed multiple profiles. Focus group sizes ranged from two to four participants, and participants involved in these groups were always paired with others of the same category.

Interviews were held between the months of April and May 2023, and were either conducted virtually on Zoom or in-person. Participants were recruited either through personal networks, or by reaching out to contacts on the Safe Schools email list. A total of 19 participants were interviewed, with parents comprising the largest category, while students comprised the smallest category (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participant demographics

Student	2
Parent/guardian/caregiver	6
Individual affiliated with community organization	2
Community advocate	5
HWDSB Staff	4
Total	19

2.3 Thematic analysis

Thematic analyses of the interviews (performed by Izzah Khairi) and literature review (performed by Avery Rhind and Jiwon Hwang) were conducted separately, each producing their own set of themes. For the interviews, the themes generated from participants were checked with the themes in Dulai et al.'s report. This initial separation in analyses was done to minimize the influence of either part of the study on the other.

Following completion of the separate analyses of the literature review and interviews, all three student researchers independently examined both analyses together to determine where the information from the primary and secondary data converged, diverged, or complemented one another in a process known as "triangulation."

Finally, all three researchers convened to finalize the themes of both parts of the study by merging, separating, removing, and re-working elements of the data. As such, the findings shared in this report are reflective of themes developed in combination from both the interviews and the literature review (see Appendix A).

3. Models from the Literature

Eleven models were identified from the secondary literature review and are briefly described in this section. These models were also independently analysed from the interviews and combined into themes specific to the secondary research (see Appendix A). A chart matching models to the aforementioned themes can be found in Figure 2.

Bond Oversight Committee

The Ferndale School District's Bond Oversight Committee By-Laws is a set of guidelines used to govern the bond oversight committee within the Ferndale School District (Ferndale School District, 2019). The main function of the bond oversight committee is to oversee taxpayer funds in relation to bond measures being used at the board. The by-laws describe logistical considerations, including the function and responsibilities of the board, limitations of its committee members, membership (including how members are chosen, membership requirements, and the role of members), conflicts of interest, conflict resolution, how meetings will run, as well as involvement by administration and the general public.

Civilian/Community Oversight

The concept of civilian or community oversight was identified in two sources related to policing in the United States. The first, written by the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement, is a general description of civilian oversight when implemented to oversee a law enforcement system ("Community oversight," n.d.). This particular civilian oversight aim to increase transparency and accountability of police services within their communities. The organization describes what is needed within an oversight body in order for oversight to be meaningful and also describes various components to avoid.

The second source, an ordinance enacted in State College, Pennsylvania describes the implementation of a community oversight board that oversees the municipality's police service (Ordinance 2164, 2021). The intentions of this community oversight board are to work towards "smart, equitable, community-oriented policing," and repair the relationship between the community and police service. The ordinance includes details the purpose of the oversight board; roles, responsibilities, and limitations of the oversight board; as well as a description of how the board would be staffed. The second source builds upon the first by providing an example of how the concepts described by the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement might look in action.

Coalition

Prevention Institute is a nonprofit national center dedicated to improving community health that has developed an eight step guide for developing effective coalitions: 1) analyze the program's objectives to determine whether to form a coalition, 2) recruit the right people, 3) devise a set of preliminary objectives and activities, 4) convene the coalition, 5)

anticipate the necessary resources, 6) define elements of a successful coalition structure, 7) maintain coalition vitality, and 8) make improvements through evaluation (Cohen et al., 2011). This model aims to incorporate community participation and promote equitable health outcomes amongst various social and economic groups.

Collective Impact 3.0

Collective impact 3.0, a progression of the original CI framework, acknowledges some benefits to CI, including its ability to describe ideas clearly and lay out new operating systems for effective community change (Cabaj & Weaver, 2016). However, it also points out the limitations of CI, such as its excessive focus on short-term data, an over-investment in backbone support, and (perhaps most importantly in the context of the HWDSB board) its insufficient attention to the role of community in its change efforts. CI 3.0 proposes upgrades to the five foundational elements of CI, and also its leadership paradigm. Specifically for the latter, the paradigm has shifted from a managerial approach to a movement-building approach, which focuses on reforming and transforming systems, as opposed to simply improving systems. As improving a system implies the preservation of the current system, the community may be suspicious of any bold measures being taken, resulting in resistance or blockage of transformative ideas.

Community Change Initiative

Community change initiatives (CCI) focus on four types of investments necessary to community building: 1) developing individual leadership, 2) increasing organizational capacity,

increasing social capital and a sense of community among residents, and 4) increasing civic capacity and voice (Kubisch, et al., 2010). Investments can generate policy and system changes when there is an emphasis on positive returns for the neighbourhood over long-term periods. The model also provides certain “alignments” that are commonly associated with success: having intentionality in action; assessing and building capacity; effective management of partnerships and collaborations; and learning and adapting along the way. CCI does, however, suffer from theory failure and implementation failure. Theory failure highlights how CCI is often overly optimistic in expecting a major improvement with only a small amount of finances or resources; whereas implementation failure relates to how underinvestment in balancing objectives and relationships between community groups can result in weak capacity and lack of sustainability.

Community Organizing

The Neighbourhood Leadership Institute Workshop defines community organizing as the “process of bringing together members of a community to work towards common interests” (Basics of Community Organizing, n.d.). The guide underscores the importance of pre-work; that is, establishing fundamentals before community development takes place, which include stakeholders’ alignment of issue(s); developing a common mission and strategies; timelines; and identification of allies. Tools for recruiting and engaging people for community change are also cited.

Community Progress Reporting

Two sources on community progress reporting were identified. The first source describes how to prepare a community progress report, including having a committee for evaluation; collaboratively selecting and agreeing upon certain outcomes and performance indicators; selecting a format for how the information in the report will be shared with others; assigning specific members to tasks; agreeing on a deadline; and searching for opportunities where the results of the report can be shared (Seppanen, 1998).

The second source is a community progress report by Truckee Meadows Tomorrow, an organization based in Nevada, United States that aims to strengthen its community and collectively address challenges through collaboration between various stakeholders, such as schools, businesses, and the government (2022 community progress report, 2022). To inform the general public of the progress they have made, the organization published their version of a community progress report. This report includes updates of their key outcomes and indicators, as well as descriptions of what makes their indicators, and report in general, successful.

Community-Led Social Auditing

Community-led social auditing aims to provide a voice to the public and is a method of building social accountability, wherein the public may hold institutions, service providers, and/or the government responsible for their actions (Community-led social audit, 2017). Social auditing can take different forms, examples of which include the use of tools like community score cards and citizen report cards, or even certain processes such as having the public directly participate in building budgets. As evidenced, participation by the public is a key component of community-led social auditing, and the process of social auditing itself is often initiated by groups within the public. One important benefit of social auditing is that it may help in building trust between the community and the institution being audited.

An example of social auditing in action is its implementation by Equal Education. This organization in South Africa used social auditing to educate the public on certain flaws within the education system and also to gather opinions from the public with questionnaires (A guide, 2015). The results of this social auditing were ultimately used to demonstrate to the government the need for community-led oversight of the South African education system.

Connected Community Approach

The connected community approach (CCA) was first introduced in Scarborough and focuses on the backbone organization of community development, such as the connectedness of residents, organizations, and cross-sector players participating in change (Gloger, n.d.). The objective is not to exclude or replace neighbourhood projects or programs, but rather to build upon them. CCA emphasizes clearly communicating various priorities of involved community groups, the need for place-based interventions, and the understanding that learning should remain constant. CCA's main limitations are its a structural approach to community development; an over-reliance on qualitative measurements (which poses a problem for funding allocation); and the requirement of a high-functioning, local organization that is already well-established, has trusting relations with both residents and external organizations, and already possesses the necessary funding.

Needle-Moving Community Collaboratives

The Bridgespan Group is a global nonprofit organization that supports a variety of organizations in increasing their impact on societal challenges and issues (Jolin et al., 2012). The organization published a report identifying the core principles, key characteristics, and resources to support successful needle-moving community collaboratives in the United States. This report provides insight on four successful components of community-based organizations and collaboratives aiming to address community challenges: 1) a shared agenda amongst all stakeholders, 2) effective leadership, 3) adequate resources, and 4) alignment of resources towards strategies previously proven effective. For example, the Strive Partnership designed a "cradle-to-career" approach to support students facing poverty in reaching post-secondary education in Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. Collaboration from a wide range of stakeholders and system leaders was a significant part of their ability to develop their approach.

Rainbow Framework

The Rainbow Framework organizes strategies and processes related to monitoring and evaluation into the following clusters: Manage (including decision-making, logistical considerations, management, review of evaluations, and the capacity for evaluation); Define (describing what is being evaluated); Frame (defining the purpose of the evaluation); Describe (detailing data collection and analysis); Understand Causes (determining what has caused the outcomes obtained during data collection); Synthesize (integrating data); and Report & Support Use (developing a report or other format to share findings and recommendations) (Rainbow Framework, n.d.).

Figure 2. Themes based on models from the literature review

	Use of resources	Cohesion among stakeholders	Adaptability	Involvement of community	Independence	Logistical details	Utilization of data collection and outcome measures	Standout ideas
Bond oversight committee by-laws					X	X		X
Civilian/ community oversight	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Coalition	X	X	X			X	X	
Collective impact 3.0	X	X	X	X				
Community change initiative (CCI)	X	X	X	X				
Community organizing		X						X
Community progress reporting		X		X		X	X	
Community-led social auditing		X		X				
Connected community approach (CCA)	X	X	X	X			X	
Needle-moving community collaboratives	X	X	X					
Rainbow Framework		X		X			X	

4. Findings and Themes

Since all of the themes from the literature appeared in the interviews, themes from the interviews will be presented in this section, supported by examples from the literature review where that theme was found (see Appendix B). (As a note, the theme of data was more detailed in the literature, whereas it was spoken to more generally by participants during the interviews.)

4.1 Is recommendation 10.3 needed?

Considering that the Safe Schools Action Plan was released two years before the beginning of this study, and the world has undergone a pandemic in the intervening years, it was paramount to first investigate if community members viewed recommendation 10.3 as still needed or relevant to Safe Schools. Of the fifteen participants who were non-HWDSB staff, fourteen individuals agreed that the recommendation was needed or helpful, with a few doing so under specific conditions (e.g., for coordination purposes, for accountability, with the assurance that the oversight would take on a supportive approach), and one disagreed about the recommendation being needed. For the latter, the individual was concerned about whether the recommendation would merely be tokenistic in nature or only satisfy a “public relations” role. They also wondered if resources for the oversight could potentially be better used elsewhere to address bullying.

“Someone needs to just make sure if they’re saying, ‘Here are the recommendations. This is what the board’s committed to address in the recommendations.’ Yes, there needs to be an agency, a body, something, whether it’s you or whoever that says, ‘How has this process gone? Have they met the targets of the things they said they were going to do?’”

-Community advocate

“Checking in on us, because we don’t want to do this last second, then it won’t be done perfectly. We need to make sure this is good and accurate information, and good guidelines that will actually work. If someone checking in on us, they can hold us accountable very easily.”

-Student

“Maybe it has meetings, and it says stuff, but it doesn’t have any genuine contribution. It has no substantive contribution. Or it is window dressing. It’s public relations. It is merely a token.”

-Individual affiliated with community organization

The significance of going into the Hamilton community to investigate their perspectives of oversight is corroborated by the literature, as seen in models such as civilian oversight, which asserts that initiatives should be tailored towards the needs of the community (“Community oversight,” n.d.).

4.2 Form before function

Following an identification of whether community members viewed the recommendation as relevant in 2023, the next step would be to determine the purpose of the oversight, as well as its expectations and capabilities. That is, a) what are the objectives of the oversight, and b) what should (or can) it do to address that purpose? These questions about function would need to take place before the oversight’s “form” can be determined.

"For me, form should follow the function, and I think it's not quite clear yet. I think it is worth spending the time exploring and thinking about purpose and function. And then the form will flow from there."

-Community advocate

Two models from the literature that create time for this pre-work are community organizing and needle-moving community collaboratives (Basics of community organizing, n.d.; Jolin et al., 2012). While both models note that this process of determining a shared vision for the group can be time-consuming, they also note that doing so generally leads to greater success for the initiative.

4.2.1 Why have oversight?

Accountability in addressing bullying

While the specific purposes of the oversight will need to be further clarified and agreed upon by partners in future discussions, one recurring theme from participants regarding recommendation

10.3 is that it should provide accountability and also be independent in said accountability. Participants mentioned that an element of neutrality could come from involving (an) independent individual(s) unaffiliated with either HWDSB or the community. In the literature, this type of independent oversight is found in models of a **bond oversight committee** and **civilian oversight** ("Community oversight," n.d.; "Ferndale School District," 2019).

"I feel like you also need, like, you want somebody that's neutral to you. Like, I love this idea of the board partnering with the university."

-HWDSB staff

"Maybe a kind of a secondment, or an outside consultant, or some kind of ombudsman office. I don't know. Some sort of independent office within the HWDSB but outside of [...] That might be a good way to do it."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

For some participants, another aspect of accountability came from the history behind why the *Safe Schools Action Plan* was created in the first place and also the potential of the oversight. Many recognized the vast undertaking that remains to be accomplished and expressed a desire for the oversight to adhere to and strive towards the original goal that the board promised to achieve. As part of this commitment, viewing the work through the lens of students could be helpful to ground the work, as is the lens of any individuals who are experiencing or have experienced bullying, as the problem extends beyond student-to-student.

"We need to hold the school board accountable, because something needs to be done. [...] I just feel like they're not moving fast enough; this has been two years in the works."

-Parent

"Students know what's going on at school a lot of the time. We can't make guidelines without student voice, or it might not completely work."

-Student

"Because bullying happens student-to-student, student-to-teacher, sometimes teacher-to-student, teacher-to-teacher, principal-to-teacher, director-to-teacher. It's not as simple as people think."

-Community advocate

Without question, addressing bullying will take time, and there can be no short-term plan of a few years. Rather, as participants have stressed, there must be long-term commitment in the magnitude of, for example, decades. Needle-moving community collaboratives highly endorse this longer timeframe, such as with an acknowledgement that there needs to be a sustainment of such activities even when objectives have already been met (Jolin et al., 2012). As well, a few participants highlighted the fact that school boards tend to work by school year, with demands and priorities varying throughout. Consequently, they identified that the oversight's activities should continue regularly in order to retain the drive for this work.

"Because, again, the past experiences, it gets forgotten after, what, five years. Basically. So having a sample written in such a way with some markers down the line — five, ten, fifteen years down the line, with a really long-term commitment – is very essential."

-Community advocate

"There's the risk of losing sight and losing structures because it's the end of a calendar year or a school year. So something that has connections to outside of the school board, with a bit of a broader mandate, with longer timelines [...] to sustain commitment and focus on this issue beyond the usual school year cycles."

-Community advocate

Action-based

While a few participants expressed that there may be value in holding conversations about the work in of itself, there was a greater bias from both staff and non-staff participants that the oversight be action-based, with tangible and specific outcomes or tasks. In the literature, coalitions similarly advocate for generating activities with a tangible product in order to sustain member motivation (Cohen et al., 2011).

"I'd want it to be an action-based committee, and not just a 'Hey, we're going to meet and share anecdotes and stories.' Let's do something."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

"That 41-page recommendation document. It's very 'overall.' And the time now is to break it down into action."

-Parent

"What we hear from communities is the last thing we need is another group of people talking about the things when, actually, what we need is a bias toward action."

-HWDSB staff

Timelines and adaptability

Along with the wondering around when to act, it became apparent from conversations with both staff and community members that there was a fine balance of a pressure of delivering a product as soon as possible, versus taking the appropriate time and space to ensure the oversight is set up for success with certain pre-requisites realized. Moreover, from a practical and engagement angle, participants also noted that rushed work for the sake of manufacturing a product may also be unlikely to achieve the desired outcome.

"I just think that if something like [the oversight] does happen, it needs to start happening and accumulating the information and then see where it goes from there, as opposed to making a plan, trying it, being, 'if it works or not' — I mean, the plan is already there. [...] The time now is to break it down into action."

-Parent

"What I worry about is requirement of a level of suspension. And what I mean by 'suspension' is we are so quick to want to jump to the outcome. [...] And yet, if this is indeed a community, co-created, dialogic, emergent space between two actors — communities and school board — then we need to suspend our focus on the outcome and sit in the emergent process of discovery, which happens in a conversation about what we want to do and how we want to come together around an issue we care about. And that can be very hard. Because the system, traditionally, is set up to really point to the product, and I'm talking about the process, which takes a long time."

-HWDSB staff

"I feel like we're just meeting deadlines for the sake of meeting deadlines, and we've lost the true purpose."

-Community advocate

With regards to this balance, "patient urgency" emerged as a concept from the interviews, which essentially involves exploring and experimenting to prepare well for when an opportunity arrives, and then seizing upon the opportunity when it arrives, while being able to adjust as things develop. For example, as one participant mentioned, anticipating a change of policy at the government level could mean embedding the right conditions and culture such that when a change does occur, recommendation 10.3 and Safe Schools will be prepared for it. Expecting external (and internal) changes is also found in the literature review with **coalitions** (Cohen et al., 2011). To some extent, there is an aspect of having the courage to enter into something without knowing the end might look like and also of having the expectations that things will evolve. From the literature, one of the core tenets of the **civilian oversight** model is this very acknowledgement of change being a natural part of the journey ("Community oversight," n.d.). Because of that, the model recognizes that the work will be an iterative process.

"[Patient urgency] is this balance between allowing space and time to explore, and for relationships to form, but to also make sure you're still making progress and checking about where you're headed. So I feel like that's important here. They don't have to wait until all the answers appear before they can start acting on some of this. At the same time, they don't want to jump too quickly to step five when it's really clear they need to spend some time on step one."

-Community advocate

This ability to adapt is also found in other models in the secondary research. For example, as stated by the Bridgespan Group, needle-moving community collaboratives are open to adapting approaches based on data collected, as further described in 4.4.1 (Jolin et al., 2012). As well, CCIs recognize that a key component of evaluations is the means for constant reflection and seeking improvements based on new learnings (Kubisch, et al., 2010).

Supporting Safe Schools work

Another potential key purpose of what recommendation 10.3 could be used for is that of supporting Safe Schools work and problem-solving together, as opposed to a top-down approach of tasks being dictated. For example, if set targets have not been met, the oversight could use an inquiry approach that seeks to understand why and also aims to troubleshoot any problems that might arise.

"In my mind, it would be the group coming together and saying, 'I see there's a challenge. And how can we co-create solutions to this dilemma?'"

-Community advocate

"If you feel like your school needs a meeting to make sure all the implementations are good, or if something came up and this implementation's not doing well in this school, [then] 'Oh, can we go into a meeting this time and maybe discuss ways we could help the school have these implementations.'"

-Student

"My initial feeling is making sure that there's an inquiry-based approach of what's actually happening and how can we make this work. [...] I would go with an inquiring or questioning based approach — [as in], asking questions with the intent to seek information and clarity, not to seek blame."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

"I think if you come at [Safe Schools] with a supportive lens, [then] the work that's recommended is going to be much more well received than without that support."

-HWDSB staff

Should this be the approach that the oversight takes, participants clearly stated that communicating the oversight's purpose to all individuals involved in Safe Schools will be important in facilitating collaboration. By doing so, it may reduce the possibility of the oversight being viewed as an autocratic force, which could lead to individuals becoming defensive or closed-off.

"I would hope that this committee or this oversight community group always has that understanding or appreciation of what happens at the ground level, because that's really how we're going to help create action that reduces bullying. If we take it as approach that we're all in it together. So that for me is a caveat. And sometimes – to use the term 'oversight' – some people feel like 'Well, there's someone looking over you, making sure you're doing your job.' So I think that's the thing that I would just be weary, or mindful, that the approach is not that."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

4.2.2 Co-development

A major theme involved in determining the various aspects of the oversight's function was the question of who would be in charge of determining said function. Based on the spirit of the recommendation, a clear answer by most (if not all) participants was that it needs to be co- developed by both HWDSB and the larger community of Hamilton. As is evident, bullying is an issue that extends beyond schools, and therefore addressing it requires a cooperative effort by the entire city (e.g., individuals, private organizations, public institutions).

"I think the key word in all of this is community, right? We're in a community, and we're not an island. [...] It's a city. To me, there's got to be more of a city approach, not just a school board approach."

-HWDSB staff

"It's building on the motion of the co-creation, which is that we are all responsible [...] because it is our community, and it is our children."

-Community advocate

While this whole-city approach may first appear daunting, an example of institutions (including HWDSB) and community successfully working together is the Hamilton Community Foundation's Community Research Partnership. This collaboration took a few years for members to build genuine relationships, a subtheme further elaborated in 4.4.2, and there may be other valuable lessons to be learned from this partnership that may be extrapolated for recommendation 10.3's own collaboration. In the literature, needle-moving community collaboratives also actively involve community, meaning community members are fundamental members to the collaboration who offer perspectives and engage directly in the development process, as opposed to, for example, only being able to provide input via focus groups (Jolin et al., 2012).

Community-led

While recommendation 10.3 explicitly specifies that the oversight be "community-led," there was no unanimous answer in the interviews supporting or contradicting this designation. A few instances of models in the literature that are community-led include social audit and civilian oversight, with the latter asserting that the individuals or groups most impacted by an issue should be the ones who either wholly, or partly, conduct the act of oversight (*A guide*, 2015; *Community oversight*, n.d.) In support of the oversight being community-led, a risk of not doing so, as identified by a participant, was community voices potentially becoming muffled. By contrast, a few participants expressed hesitancy around the notion of the oversight being community-led, which could have stemmed from feelings that community members do not have the power, resources, or expertise to implement such an initiative; or feelings that with their own day job, community members may not have the availability and time to actuate this extensive recommendation.

"Community-led is more complicated. Community-led is more difficult. And maybe it would be better if it was internal."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

Shared definitions

Alongside the co-development of purpose and who leads the work is the importance of a common understanding of definitions. In terms of shared terminology, many participants questioned what the terms “oversight” or “community” meant. For example, community could be as narrow as the local neighbourhood around a school, to as broad as any individual or organization involved with students and young people. The diverse answers in defining these terms demonstrate how difficult it can be to proceed without a common understanding of what is being discussed. Having a common vocabulary early on, as endorsed by **coalitions**, may help minimize issues in the future (Cohen et al., 2011).

“I feel like the word community is so general; like, what is community?”

-Parent

“What constitutes ‘community oversight’? I think it’s in the eye of the beholder, really.”

-HWDSB staff

Setting boundaries

Concurrent to defining terms together would be the crucial step of articulating the boundaries within which the oversight operates. When convening, as is also found with coalitions, a few participants noted the challenge of members entering the group with different ideas about what is possible (Cohen et al., 2011). This mismatch in expectations could cause harm. To minimize this potential tension, the board and community could discuss what pathways exist within the system for action, and also what actual power the oversight might have. For example, can it only provide feedback, can it enact any final decisions, or is there a medium answer somewhere in between.

With that question answered, a participant remarked that individuals could make an informed decision about whether or not they want to engage in the oversight.

“Without a clearly articulated, co-developed definition of what we mean by oversight, as well as a clearly articulated boundaries around what is on and off the table when it comes to the proposed outcomes of this oversight group, I feel like it could actually do a lot of harm. Because there would be mismatched expectations from community sitting on this community-led independent table and the expectations of board. Not even just the expectations on board, but what is actually possible within the current structures and systems, which are very difficult and take a lot of time to move.”

-HWDSB staff

Moreover, in order to minimize overlap, some participants articulated the need for differentiating the unique role of this oversight, such as how this oversight differs from the other structures in Safe Schools (e.g., Advisories, working groups), or even how oversight from recommendation

10.3 differs from oversight by the Board of Trustees. Participants who shared this concern cited personal experiences of being involved in initiatives that involved multiple groups, wherein having several groups actually detracted from the work.

“This is something we find in my work, too, is [that] when there’s so many groups and people doing it, nothing gets done. Because then you’re just too busy spending all your time communicating and updating people, instead of actually getting to the work.”

- Parent

4.2.3 Ensuring buy-in

Funding and resources

In addressing the aforementioned concerns in 4.2.2 about recommendation 10.3 being community-led, an idea shared by some participants involved HWDSB taking on the role of helping to provide funding and resources for the oversight. However, this also brought a few concerns, such as the question of independence for community-led oversight; as well as a wondering as to whether the board might view the oversight as something worth funding but perhaps not necessarily leading.

As expected, this pre-requisite of adequate funding is also found in models from the literature. For example, needle-moving community collaboratives without adequate financial support struggle to perform their tasks, whereas successful collaboratives have the foresight to invest in staff and infrastructure, such as from in-kind contributions or resources from partners (Jolin et al., 2012). Additionally, it is also worth mentioning that because recommendation 10.3 is, at its core, intended to be a partnership between multiple stakeholders and across sectors, the oversight may also receive support in funding and resources from related organizations and institutions invested in addressing bullying.

“You need expertise and dedicated resources for something to be community-led in a successful manner. [...] And so, I think, part of it is making sure the backbone in organizing infrastructure is there, that allows something in the community to exist and be successful. Because you can’t just expect them to pick it up — one organization to volunteer. So there has to be careful consideration around the resources required for something like this to work, and where they can come from, and who can support. And so it’s not the burden of one organization, necessarily.”

- Community advocate

Partnership

Aside from buy-in from HWDSB with regards to funding and resources, participants shared that it would be crucial for buy-in with regards to the board as a whole recognizing value in taking time to learn how to partner with community. This challenging but necessary piece of learning about other ways of being is also present in the literature, such as in the Rainbow Framework, which asserts that the building of capacities can aid in improving the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation processes (Rainbow Framework, n.d.). This includes human capacities (e.g., members acquiring new skills and knowledge) and organizational capacities (e.g., organizational culture, improved ways to function). The Strive Partnership of Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky presents an example of an initiative taking the time to learn how to work together (Jolin et al., 2012). That is, because the needle-moving collaborative engaged various organizations and institutions across sectors, each with their own way of being and doing, the members involved made an effort to find common ground amongst school staff, labour unions, nonprofit individuals, and more.

While some community members in the interviews described challenging experiences of working with HWDSB, one participant suggested that they could look to how a community functions and organizes themselves. That is, processes like an application process of who can or cannot participate, or participation by certain voting or non-voting members are not ways in which community comes together to affect change. In other words, it is known that when communities rally, they do not necessarily think about following the same guidelines or rules of institutions. There is, simply, less of that “red tape.” If the board views this learning as important, one potential avenue they could seek guidance from is in their existing partnerships with certain communities (e.g., an interfaith group at HWDSB).

"I think the board really has to ask themselves — not just the board, but it's part of this process — do we really want involvement? Is this what we really want? Because [...] you could hear things you may or may not want to hear. [...] Because I hear we want parents to be involved, but every time all my experiences getting involved [with the board], there [are] barriers. It's strenuous. And when we're not making it easy to be involved, you got to ask yourself, do you really want that involvement? [...] It's very, very formal. That's the thing: I think what the board needs to reconcile is that that's not the way that community runs. When the community gathers for anything, whether it's church or recreation, it's not like that. So if we really want a gathering of the community, we have to look at how the community actually gathers."

- Parent

As a simultaneous consideration, since this change in how an institution exists and acts with community is unlikely to happen anytime soon, it could be beneficial in the interim for the community to hear from the board as to why it operates the way it does, which could encourage greater understanding and two-way partnership. This reciprocity may also aid in building the community's knowledge base of the board's structural policies or requirements. One participant described that doing so may help the community cultivate a greater nuance or awareness of Safe Schools work, which could subsequently allow for more equitable and/or pertinent contributions by all members of the oversight regardless of background.

Competing interests

While HWDSB may be a clear partner to potentially help resource the oversight, there is to be an acknowledgement of schools potentially having their attention drawn elsewhere, such as attending to the lasting effects of a pandemic. When the Safe Schools Action Plan was released in 2021, it was tied to the Positive Culture and Well-Being priority of the board's Strategic Direction. In accordance with this, it is crucial that Safe Schools work continues to align with the board's future Strategic Directions in order to substantiate its importance in a system with competing demands. Should the Directions encompass key points relevant to the success of recommendation 10.3 (e.g., collaborative processes, transparent communication), then that could signal that conditions are ripe for pursuing recommendation 10.3. Additionally, as the Strategic Directions are informed by public consultations, seeing such appetite from community with regards to partnership would provide further rationale in collaborating with the wider community.

"I think we're still in pandemic recovery mode a little bit. And the world's changed, right. It's a busier place for many reasons."

- HWDSB staff

Referring back to the concept of patient urgency in 4.2.1, however, regardless of whether Safe Schools sees itself reflected in the Strategic Directions, the work must continue in intervening periods in terms of laying the right foundations, such that when the window of opportunity opens, the implementation of the oversight can be enacted in full force.

4.3 Design considerations

While it was emphatically emphasized by participants that specific details regarding structure (the "who," "what," "when," "where") of the oversight should be based on its purpose, individuals were, nonetheless, able to share broad considerations that have been captured in this section.

4.3.1 Who might be involved?

Important stakeholders

It is apparent that to adequately address bullying, representation is required from both community members and board members. Identified stakeholders from participants included students, parents, school staff (e.g., teachers, principals, bus drivers, crossing guards, school nurses), community organizations involved with students (see Appendix C), experts in the field of bullying, and those in sectors beyond the field of education (e.g., public health, municipal government). The last category is also found coalitions as well as needle-moving community collaboratives (Cohen et al., 2011; Jolin et al., 2012).

Of these stakeholders, it was identified in multiple interviews that student input is paramount; however, gathering that input may first involve asking students if they would like to be involved in oversight and then, if so, how they would like to be involved (e.g., through direct representation on a committee, surveys).

"The student voice is paramount, because who knows better [how] to help each other than students? And I think that's the advocacy piece where we want to advocate for students, but we need to inquire in terms of what do they need, and how can we best help."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

"[Students] need to be involved. They could be part of the committee. [...] I think it kind of would depend on what the students feel like they want to be part of and need."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

"I have seen some of the questions in [the Middle Years Development Instrument], and how that can be broken down. I think something like that is great. My only concerns with that [is] do kids have the capacity to be able to understand [and complete] those questions accurately? Maybe even shorter versions of that would be great. [...] I like the idea of anecdotal where kids are having those conversations that are a bit objective, especially [where they're with] somebody who knows how to guide those questions without probing."

-HWDSB staff

Additionally, diversity *within* student voice could be considered for the oversight. That is, obtaining involvement or feedback from students who have been former perpetrators, students who are neither bullies themselves nor being bullied, and/or students who do not typically participate in such activities. This consideration for diversity could also extend to other stakeholder categories, such as involving staff from the "ground level" to those "higher-up," or individuals from different community sectors (e.g., recreation, faith) and doing work related to various grade levels (e.g., elementary, middle school, high school).

"Student participation is one group. And, particularly, the students who have perpetrated bullying in the past [and] perpetrated bullying in the present, but also random students who are not even involved at all."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

"You could also look at having the liaison for certain groups at certain levels, because someone who is dealing with a bully in grade 8, grade 9, grade 10 is going to have a different perspective."

-Parent

"I think [recommendation 10.3] would require some representation at different levels. Different levels of representation from the school board. Different perspectives."

-Community advocate

"It's, like, you see the same faces over and over again. So I don't feel like using the word 'community' is right, because we're not involving the community; we're involving the same set of people over and over and over again in the same meetings."

-Parent

Power dynamics

Due to the combination of community and board members coming together in this work, participants commented on the possibility of issues stemming from the perceived differences in power based on the positions that members hold (e.g., a principal and student on the oversight). This concern is mirrored in **coalitions**, which note that a failure to properly address perceived power imbalances can lead to ineffective group dynamics and has the potential to impact decision-making processes (Cohen et al., 2011).

"I think we really have to be attentive to power structures, and I mean those you can do things [about]. Even just how you set up the meeting room can address power structures, and what the terms of reference are. I think if those people in positions of power are going to be part of [the oversight], then they really need to make sure they're attentive to power structures throughout the rest of what the committee does, like in the terms of reference, in the physical setup of the meetings, everything."

-Parent

A common idea by several participants to address this potential tension is to have individuals connect with each other as people first, prior to any mention of roles being introduced, which connects to the concept of relationship-building in 4.4.2. Other ideas included making time to establish group norms or giving attention to the physical set-up of the space during meetings (e.g., mixed seating).

"We know [from] facilitation research if we had more of a U-shape setup where everybody's mixed in. [...] Or just the structures of the meeting is, is it somebody presenting information (and the physical setup [could] be part of that), or [is it] the structure of 'We're bringing you an update. We're bringing you this,' as opposed to an action or a discussion item. You have to look at the structure, the agenda, the physical structure of the room."

[For example] my work with youth coming in, when an adult works with young people, we always had to have group norms. We looked at ratio. We always had to have youth-adult ratios, so that their youth voice wasn't overshadowed. So [for recommendation 10.3] maybe it's a ratio scenario, where it's two community members to one board staff. We [also] always had group norms that were created collectively with the young people. We had youth co-chairs. So, again, maybe it's a community or co-chair model."

-Parent

Listening to and amplifying voices

Special attention should also be given to voices that are not typically heard at the table. Although the majority of bullying cases may not involve minority groups, it is also understood that bullying can disproportionately affect certain populations (identified communities from interviews included BIPOC, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+, and special needs), and so it would be crucial for the oversight to consider the issue from multiple perspectives and involve those voices in the conversation. One interviewee in particular highlighted the importance of proactively seeking out the voices of minority groups. In general, participants provided examples of how this may be achieved, including reaching out to agencies representing such groups, engaging student leadership and organizations for outreach (e.g., student trustees, CC:ROSE), or leveraging upon existing relationships. Regardless, when speaking to these individuals, it is important to first ask for their interest in being involved with recommendation 10.3, and also to be mindful that their perspective may not be generalized to the entire group.

"I would say that particular attention has to be paid to voices that don't speak up, don't get hold of it, so as we try to seek out community, I use the lens of, 'Whose voice is less likely to be heard?' To make sure that those voices are included."

-Community advocate

"Again, it's like what is 'the' Indigenous community, what is 'the' Black community? It's hundreds of thousands of people, all kinds of different beliefs."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

Recruitment

More broadly, ideas for recruitment of oversight members were diverse, ranging from job postings to individual recommendations by knowledgeable parties (e.g., respected principals in the community). If it is decided that recruitment will be open to any interested parties, participants suggested that a general call-out to the public might be useful, as they noted from their personal experiences that a sizeable portion of the community may simply not be aware of Safe Schools work or are unaware of whether they can join.

While some participants advocated that oversight membership should be open to anyone, others cited the value of being more selective, as they believed doing so may produce a more dedicated team able to invest the significant time and effort needed to enact properly recommendation 10.3. If a selection criteria will be applied, general considerations include individuals who:

- have an understanding of bullying, and/or are involved in reducing bullying;
- work with diverse communities;
- Are somewhat impartial, yet still not entirely external;
- may not typically be found partaking in this work; and/or
- (specifically with regards to staff) genuinely want to be a part of the work, not because they are required to.

"You could have some sort of selection process. There are upsides to doing that, and you get, like, high quality people who you want to hear from. Whatever your criteria is, you're able to use that criteria to screen the correct kind of people — however you want to define what 'correct' means — but that necessarily means you're then diminishing the denominator. You have fewer people to select from. When it's open everybody, your denominator is giant, and so you might have a bigger numerator.

The difficult part of community-led, etcetera, is participation. And that's part of what I'm identifying is when you try to do these kind of community-led things, like a committee of people, you got to have high investment from those people. Those people have got to be invested in order to regularly participate, and they're not going to be like, 'Oh, there's that thing, it's kind of optional,' and, 'I'm kind of busy, I think I'll not do it this time,' and then you got a meeting with two people."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

"I feel like it should be open to anyone. If you want to come, go ahead, come. And if you can't make it to some meetings, that's totally fine, schedules change very quickly. Just, yeah, anyone can come."

-Student

"I've seen this before, too, in my past work, where you have somebody who's close to retirement and just doesn't care anymore, they're just punching the clock and doing whatever they have to do to get through to their pension. So it's not going to be an easy process, but I think there should be some checks and balances in there as to who is part of this."

-Parent

On the topic of an open or selective recruitment process, Prevention Institute's coalition guide suggests having a mix of both, wherein certain individuals are recruited but all interested are welcome (Cohen et al., 2011). This compromise may be useful as it mitigates the impression of being exclusionary to individuals who are keen on being involved, while also keeping in mind that when having an entirely open meeting, the effect of variable attendance could potentially disrupt group process and progress.

Compensation

Perceptions of compensation for oversight members were mixed. Generally, participants stated that if members are volunteers, then their involvement may or may not necessitate compensation (e.g., none for a few hours a month, but perhaps tokens for a lengthier involvement).

Additionally, a consideration raised was the possibility of the intentions of some individuals involved in the oversight potentially being skewed if financial payment is involved.

"When we start paying, are they community-led anymore? I agree, we need to show gratitude for service, for sure, absolutely. But I worry, or I think, that [...] it's not truly community-led if we're paying people to do that work."

-HWDSB staff

"I think it really depends on what the ask is and the time commitment. [...] Everybody just has to ask themselves, 'Would I, as a staff person, show up if I wasn't being paid?' And this is all the same work, and it just shows a level of value for what they're contributing, as opposed to just being. [...] And it never has to be a lot. That's the thing. It never has to be a lot. So I definitely think compensation has to be considered or built in from the beginning."

-Parent

"I think, for a person like myself, not me particularly, but a community agency type [compensation is] not so important. [...] And I think many people in my kind of role would see it the same way. Like, 'This is a part of my day job. It makes sense for me to contribute. I don't need to be compensated.' But as a parent, if my kid's school wanted me to do a monthly meeting for something or other, then I could see, like, the \$150 Amazon gift card [edging] me towards participation."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

"I feel like when you're 12, and you get promised money or things like that, then they [may not be involved for the right reasons] — if you know what I mean? So when you're older and it's something that means a lot to you, or you're passionate about it, or something along the lines of that, and you're doing it with good intentions, then the compensation's just kind of a bonus or something like that — encouragement."

-Student

As a consideration, non-monetary compensation could also be provided to members and, for this, Maslow's hierarchy of needs could be taken as a model (e.g., food provided, transportation to meeting location, warm shelters, safer spaces).

"Working with young people, we always look at Maslow's hierarchy of needs. [...] So are we providing food at a meeting? Are we giving them bus tickets to get there? Are we providing shelter? Is the meeting in a safe space where they're gonna be warm? And for that hour that they're with us, do they feel safe, [do] they have a support system, and stuff like that."

-Parent

It is important to note, however, that payment was deemed necessary if an individual is working on recommendation 10.3 as part of their job title or description, such as an individual part of a backbone team. This view aligns with the CCA model, which asserts that paying the individuals on this backbone team is a crucial part of success (Gloger, n.d.).

Backbone team

A dedicated backbone team for recommendation 10.3 was regarded as necessary by participants. This view of an indispensable core team was mirrored by virtually all of the models from the literature review, such as needle-moving community collaboratives, which similarly found in their own research of groups that "nothing happened between meetings" and the work "could not get done" without paid staff leading it (Jolin et al., 2012). The team may be composed of strictly board members, or also include community members. Identified roles from the interviews were administration, data, and communications (see Table 2).

"You could have one person at the school who is the dedicated person. But then you have to give that person the opportunity to put their other work or things aside, and have a day, or a half day, or even just an hour, once a month, or whatever the case may be to say, 'We're going to sit down, we're going to focus on bullying, we're going to talk about it openly, whatever.' And have that person supported and given the tools that they need to make the changes right."

-Parent

"At some point moving forward, establishing the backbone is super important. Otherwise, everybody just keeps talking and talking and talking about it."

-Community advocate

"I like the idea of community partners in paid positions that have experience in — not just necessarily in an educational background — but definitely in the practical sense of implementing it."

-HWDSB staff

Table 2. Backbone team roles found in interviews and the literature review

Role	Description/Sample Tasks	Identified in Interviews	Identified in Literature
Activity Coordinator	Leading special events	No	Coalitions
Administration	Clerical and in-meeting duties	Yes	Bond oversight committee, civilian oversight, coalitions, community organizing, needle-moving community collaboratives
Communications	Development of materials to share with public	Yes	CCA, coalitions, needle-moving community collaboratives
Data	Collection and evaluation of data	Yes	CCA, coalitions, community progress reporting, needle-moving community collaboratives
Facilitator	For both meetings and networking	No	CCA, needle-moving community collaboratives
Fundraiser	Raising money	No	CCA, coalitions
Membership Supporter	Recruitment, orientation, and encouragement of members	No	Coalitions

Length of involvement

It was also suggested by participants that the oversight be balanced with regards to consistent and new membership, as having a stream of individuals constantly moving on may be disruptive to the group's function. As seen in community organizing, however, a few participants noted that it is to be expected that members' availabilities and priorities throughout the year (or years) change (Basics of community organizing, n.d.). Such changes to membership may present as a difficulty to the oversight, which is a challenge that is also identified in coalitions (Cohen et al., 2011). Two participants proposed facilitating such turnovers through the implementation of terms with a possibility for renewal, so that individuals clearly understand the timeline and commitment they are being requested to fulfill. The coalition model also stipulates that this consideration for members' time is important, as individuals will not have unlimited availability (Cohen et al., 2011). This extends to individual meetings, wherein keeping schedules to their pre-determined length might help in respecting the oversight members' valuable time.

"Maybe if you have a term. Like, 'Okay we're going to meet in this committee from, 'This is the starting point and this is the endpoint, we can always renew, but we want people to be committed for this time period.' That might be helpful. Just so that people know it's not just a forever thing, or it's not just a one-month thing."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

"I think if it's something that's going to be staff-led or led by a community member like a parent or guardian, I think there needs to be some very clear indication of the amount of commitment that's going to be needed at the beginning very early on prior to when things really want to be executed."

-HWDSB staff

An overlap of the respective start and end periods for incoming and outgoing members may aid in facilitating transfer of knowledge. Both **coalitions** and **community organizing** stipulate that new members should have a comprehensive orientation, and also be made to feel welcome and included so as to alleviate potential feelings they may have of not being able to provide anything new to the group (Cohen et al., 2011).

"If you have a structure where people are rolling off the committee and people are rolling on the committee, there needs to be like an overlap time. So if I'm rolling off the committee, and you're rolling on the committee, we need to have time where we're talking together, so that it's passing the torch. 'Okay, here's where we're starting, here's where we are now, here's where we think we have to go, but it's really up for this committee to kind of keep driving that.'"

-Individual affiliated with community organization

Group size

While the exact number of individuals on the oversight could not yet be determined, participants believed that a smaller group would be more conducive to decision-making, as further elaborated in 4.4.1. Participants also stated the size of the group may not need to be confined to strict parameters and could instead be fluid. Both ideas from the interviews are supported by the coalition model, which notes that a larger group will likely face greater barriers in decision-making, and that the size of the group should depend on purpose (Cohen et al., 2011).

"It's hard to involve, genuinely, 15 people in a thing. Because there's too many people, and it will take a million years."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

4.3.2 What might the oversight's format look like?

While it may be preemptive to determine the format of recommendation 10.3 prior to its function, several ideas have, nonetheless, been included in this section to reflect the diverse perspectives at the time this report was drafted. In no particular order, participants' ideas of what the oversight may look like are:

- a "chain," where execution goes "down" while feedback of that execution goes "up";
- public consultations, with board staff and ward trustees actively going into their respective neighbourhoods/wards to obtain the community's input on Safe Schools, including how to improve;
- a body consisting of HWDSB and community members forming the oversight, supported by a dedicated backbone team coordinating logistics;
- to leverage upon current Safe Schools groups (Advisories, working groups) into an oversight role, as they would already be connected and invested in the work;
- a flowchart or progress chart detailing Safe Schools-related tasks and individual(s) responsible for said task.

4.3.3 What tasks might the oversight undertake?

Checking progress and process of Safe Schools

Participants who both had and had not partaken in Safe Schools Advisories unanimously shared that recommendation 10.3 should be used to check in on the progress of Safe Schools work (e.g., deadlines met, recommendations being adhered, consistency in addressing all recommendations equally), and many stated that oversight should also include checking in on how the process of that work was being carried out (e.g., if community members' voices are being heard, how communication between members has gone). Checking in on both progress and process can help with both the sustainability and maintenance of Safe Schools, so that it carries on into the long-term, but also so that improvements to the work may be identified.

"I think it can be easy for things to fall off. If anything, probably my greatest concern with anything implemented is its maintenance."

- HWDSB staff

Monitoring the oversight itself

Aside from the oversight's tasks being to "check in" on Safe Schools work, a few participants mentioned that this checking in could be extended to the oversight itself to ensure that it is achieving its goals. Change will undoubtedly happen over time, such as through members finding more effective ways to function, or revisions to funding. In the literature, community organizing also explicitly mentions evaluating the initiative itself and taking time to reflect on how things have been going (Basics of community organizing, n.d.). Furthermore, this model states that all members in the initiative (which would be the oversight members in the case of recommendation 10.3) should participate in that evaluation.

"I feel like what might work this year, maybe in two years, we'll need to add more tweaks, just so it stays [in] a good environment."

- Student

Coalitions provide a more detailed approach to monitoring with “summative” and “formative” evaluations (Cohen et al., 2011). Similar to what participants shared, summative evaluations focus on the progress to assess whether the group is achieving the goals it intends to achieve, whereas formative evaluations focus on the process of the group.

Involvement of the general public

Participants highlighted communication to be the main way of involving the broader community in order to maintain transparency and accountability to the public. Continuing with the notion of a whole-city approach to effectively address bullying, a few participants expressed that it may be helpful for all partners in this work to be free-flowing with information. This concept of communication with the broader public was a major piece of the several models of the literature, including community progress reporting, which uses data to maintain communication and transparency; civilian oversight, which necessitates that meetings, reports, and operations should be made public; the Rainbow Framework, which stipulates that findings be shared with the audience the initiative was intended to affect; as well as the bond oversight committee, which involves the public sharing of meeting minutes within one week of a meeting (Community oversight, n.d.; “Ferndale School District,” 2019; Seppanen, 1998; Rainbow Framework, n.d.).

Such mechanisms to increase communication with the public may contribute to an increased capacity for more individuals to meaningfully participate in meetings if they are aware of what is happening.

“I find [not being free-flowing with information] hinders the process. Let’s just be honest with each other. Whereas there’s always that political red tape.”

- Parent

Participants listed several avenues by which information could be disseminated to the public, including on HWDSB’s website, through email, social media, material sent home with students, and even in-person (e.g., between teachers and students, with that potentially trusting relationship enabling students to be more comfortable in asking questions). Specifically for the website, while it was recognized as an avenue by multiple participants, these participants also described how it was difficult to navigate and access Safe Schools information with the site’s current state. More broadly, the wide range of communication methods shared reflects the idea that each person receives their information differently, and hence the importance of taking into account that diversity. For example, some participants mentioned email as a preferred format, while others opted for social media.

“I think, with teachers and students, there’s a more level of trust [...] So I think if it’s someone like that explaining it to you, you might just comprehend it a bit more; or if you have questions, you could feel more comfortable asking them.”

-Student

“You could [share Safe Schools information] on the website, but even [with] the website, I don’t find a lot of people follow what’s going on. I certainly don’t. I read the newsletters, but I don’t have a lot of time to go and visit the website. But just having a Safe Schools Twitter page, or something like that, or LinkedIn, or Instagram, or social media, or whatever. Just to get the information out there. [...] You may even need to look at hiring a communication specialist.”

-Parent

"I think maybe that's part of one of the tasks – is to figure out what's gonna work best for the demographic you're trying to reach. How do they get their information? Because I'm of an older generation, my generation uses Facebook. I can tell you that's an old person thing. But that's a way."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

It was also expressed during the interviews that data could be an element of this communication; however, there should be consideration for data literacy. One participant mentioned how this barrier could be managed by pairing data with story. As part of this idea, they described the "results-based accountability" framework as a method to share progress with the general public.

"I think there has to be some good story sharing elements to the data communication."

-Parent

"[Results-based accountability] is really a communication tool for taking data and putting it in products that people can understand about what we've done in our work. [...] It basically seeks to answer mainly, if I drill it down [to] three questions: how much did we do, how well did we do it, and what was the impact?"

-Parent

The topic of volume of communication was also mentioned by a few participants. This concept is shared by the **community organizing** model, in that over-communication may cause messages to be buried, or individuals to be desensitized or disengaged (Basics of community organizing, n.d.). A lack of communication, however, may lead to a sense of being excluded and forgotten. One consideration to deal with this fine balance of information volume is to communicate any large change within recommendation 10.3 or Safe Schools to the public.

"With me, personally, I think I would like to be updated somewhat often; but I think if things are mostly staying the same, and then if something just comes up or something's going to change, I think I'd like to be updated then. But I think it might start getting a bit annoying if I would get an email or things like that pretty often. So I think, even if things are going really good and nothing's really changing, and something does come up, maybe you just send an email or talk to someone about that. [...] But just in general, maybe unless something big came up, or something's going to change, then maybe just kind of leave it like that."

-Student

While many cited communication to be the main avenue by which recommendation 10.3 can involve the broader public, as mentioned in 4.3.2, one participant explicitly cited public consultation as an example by which the oversight might seek input broadly. The literature hosted examples of generating direct community involvement beyond communication. For example, the bond oversight committee notes that public meetings should be open to the public, and that such public meetings should be advertised in order to increase visibility and engagement ("Ferndale School District," 2019). As well, during these meetings, there is designated time for public comment by any member of the community, and this opportunity to share is guaranteed by the committee's by-laws. As another example, social audits gather direct input from the public through the use of citizen report cards, a type of participatory surveys; and community score cards, a monitoring instrument (Community-led social audit, 2017).

4.3.4 When might meetings take place?

Meeting frequency

While specific frequency of meetings should be based on the purpose(s) and task(s) of recommendation 10.3, participants agreed that meetings should occur regularly to allow members to convene and plan. This idea of a regular meeting format is also found in coalitions, which notes that such an arrangement may contribute to greater participation (Cohen et al., 2011). Suggested timeframes of frequency from the participants ranged from biweekly to annually, with the most common suggestion being bimonthly or quarterly. They also noted that meetings did not need to be as frequent as other Safe Schools work. In support of participants' suggested meeting frequencies, the bond oversight committee provides consistent quarterly updates ("Ferndale School District," 2019). Meanwhile, coalitions implement a meeting frequency of every other month, with members being more likely to participate in smaller subcommittees when the larger, overall group meets less frequently (Cohen et al., 2011). This may be pertinent to Safe Schools, if some oversight members are also involved in Safe Schools Advisory groups.

"[Frequency] depends on what [the oversight is] trying to do. And without specifically knowing what they're trying to do, I would be hesitant to say. [...] If it's checking-in and making sure, then I could see a monthly or quarterly being kind of in order. Bimonthly? Every second month? Something like that. It wouldn't need to be more frequent than that, I think. There's a big difference between monthly and quarterly, so it triples the amount, but something more on the scale of every second month. Quarterly. It wouldn't need to be weekly, biweekly, nothing like that."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

"I think it would depend on the work plan. What are the timelines laid out and the workplan? What are the reporting requirements?"

-Parent

"I think it depends on what the tasks are. But, you know, once a month, or once every couple of months, for sure. I think if you do it, like, three times a year, that's probably not enough, because I think it requires action — and also things change. So if you're meeting on more of a regular basis, then you can adjust to changes that are happening."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

Time of day

A major consideration for meetings was whether to host them during the day (when individuals may be working), or in the evening (when individuals may be preoccupied with other activities). The models of coalitions and community organizing shared these same considerations (Basics of community organizing, n.d.; Cohen et al., 2011). One participant noted how scheduling software may be used to help facilitate an overall time that works best for all members.

"Some of them were during the day, so I work -- so I couldn't, unfortunately, attend, so I missed a couple."

-Parent

4.3.5 Where might meetings be held?

With the increase in online meetings in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, it may be tempting to hold meetings virtually with the assumption that doing so will be more accessible or convenient for members. However, this assumption should be checked, as the general consensus from participants was that in-person meetings would enable greater engagement if they were to be involved.

"We work better [in-person]. Better than on a screen. That doesn't work well."

-Student

"I always attend anything in person, if I can. I just feel you get a sense of the room. You get a feeling. You know what I mean. I enjoy that, but I'm a D type personality. So for me I need that physical [connection] [...] But there's different types of people that don't like that."

-Parent

"In-person is always my preference. There's nothing like being in person, especially if the agenda requires participation. If I'm just going to hear a speaker present to me, that's fine to be online; but if you're asking me to provide input, or do some sort of group work, or share something [...] I think the agenda might dictate the mode, too."

-Parent

A hybrid option could also be considered, granted that there is proper equipment to ensure that no members are left feeling disconnected. If meetings were to be held in-person, the location of the meeting should be considered for accessibility, which is supported by **community organizing** (Basics of community organizing, n.d.). For example, are meetings being held at a member's organization space, at a specific school, or even in spaces where students gather?

Coalitions, likewise, consider meeting location, including comfortability (e.g., room size, ventilation) and rotation of sites (Cohen et al., 2011). Within the context of Safe Schools, switching between HWDSB and community sites could be done to demonstrate investment from both parties.

4.4 Operational considerations

4.4.1 How might decisions be made?

The three decision-making options discussed in interviews were: by a single individual, majority vote, and consensus. For all three approaches, however, participants emphasized that there should be space for discussions prior to any decisions being made. For example, if a single individual were to be responsible for the ultimate decision, they would need to first seek input from their fellow group members; in other words, a consultative decision-making style.

Advantages of this approach would be that decisions could be made faster and the bystander effect (potentially seen in a consensus approach) could be mitigated.

However, whether directly or indirectly alluded to, the other two decision-making styles of consensus and voting were more popular with participants. Both are also commonly found in the models of **community organizing** and **needle-moving community collaboratives** (Basics of community organizing, n.d.; Jolin et al., 2012). As consensus typically requires more time to properly implement than other approaches, a technique by coalitions to mitigate this

process is to frame a consensus as one in which the majority support, and that the minority can accept (Cohen et al., 2011). This consideration may be particularly salient if the community and oversight values timely actions, as conveyed in 4.2.1. Further, community organizing also shares that there could also be scenarios in which the typical decision-making approach (e.g., consensus) is superseded in favour of other approaches (e.g., voting); however, the model cautions that this must be stipulated and agreed-upon in advance by members (Basics of community organizing, n.d.; Cohen et al., 2011).

"Hierarchical is easier. Hierarchical is faster, smaller. [...] It's harder to get 25 people to agree to what to put on a pizza than two. That's just true. When you're ordering pizza for a group of 25 it's like, 'Let's make survey and try to get everyone's opinions on what's the favorite toppings.' [Versus] it's you and your friend, it's easy to decide what to put on the pizza, and so it's no doubt easier and faster to have a structure. I actually think number of people is a big factor. [...] It's easier to be consensus-building with four people than it is with 15. [...] I think no matter which group of 15 or 20 people, lots of people are just going to be, like, 'Ah, whatever.'"

-Individual affiliated with community organization

As the chosen decision-making style has the opportunity to reflect the purpose and intentions of the oversight, considerable thought should be given to the selected approach, as recommended by **coalitions** (Cohen et al., 2011). This selection may be especially important for groups that aim to mitigate perceived power differentials amongst its members.

Data

An added dimension to the decision-making process mentioned by a few participants was the use of data to inform decisions and evaluate outcome. Related to 4.3.1, an example of how data could be utilized is to scan the demographic of groups affected by bullying but not currently represented on the oversight, and then using that data to seek out the perspectives of those groups. Models in the literature that have a notably data-driven approach are **needle-moving community collaboratives** and the **Rainbow Framework** (Jolin et al., 2012; Rainbow Framework, n.d.).

"So you have data. It tells you that these are groups that are being overly affected in an adverse way. Therefore, you have a special responsibility, reading the data, to make sure that you connect, as integrally as possible, with those groups, recognizing that you have to be careful, even within those groups, to hear the voices that don't come out and speak. So you use your data to make sure that there are groups that are adversely affected, who you try to hear their voice, and to hear their experience, and all that you know, [to] best to respond."

-Community advocate

While the interviews revealed the importance of collecting data and using that data for decision-making, only the literature produced more specific details about how that might manifest, starting with having clearly defined outcomes or performance indicators to track progress. When the organization Truckee Meadows Tomorrow used a community progress report to share their organization's updates to the community, they employed indicators that were actionable, meaningful, valuable, important, and measurable (2022 community progress, 2022). It should be noted that the method of establishing outcomes, however, can vary. For example, needle-moving community collaboratives use previously collected data to define the problem and establish outcome measures, whereas collective impact 3.0 suggests that outcomes should be based on community aspiration (Cabaj & Weaver, 2016; Jolin et al., 2012). Once outcomes and/or indicators have been explicitly determined, data corresponding to those measures can be collected.

The type of data may also be considered. For example, CCAs primarily use qualitative data as the basis for their work, whereas other models consider both qualitative and quantitative data (Gloger, n.d.). An oversight model that has implemented data collection is civilian oversight in State College, Pennsylvania.

4.4.2 How might members interact with each other?

Collaborative culture

As described in section 4.2.2, recommendation 10.3 should be, first and foremost, a cooperative effort involving community, HWDSB, and the city of Hamilton. Therefore, multiple participants maintained that the oversight should work collaboratively. Establishing a collaborative culture is also a common theme in the literature. As an example, CCIs emphasize unity as a requirement for members in the group (Kubisch et al., 2010). This might look like compromising for the bigger picture, or members not putting the blame on one another. The latter example is found in community organizing, which suggests that an individuals must develop a “broadened sense of self-interest” to encourage a more collaborative culture within the group (Basics of community organizing, n.d.).

“We need to work together. [...] We all have a responsibility and a hand in this, and it’s not just one person’s job. It’s communal.”

-Parent

“And the more people that are on the same page and working together the better, for sure. But I think it’s going to take some work to make sure we create that culture and that environment of ‘We’re doing this all together.’”

-Individual affiliated with community organization

Along with this collaborative culture, one participant noted that it is paramount for the members of the oversight to spend time outlining group norms, being explicit about their shared purpose and reasons for being involved in the work, as well as making explicit how the group will work together. This could help anchor the group’s work in the “why” the oversight exists when challenges do inevitably arise.

Building relationships

A major condition for the aforementioned collaborative culture would be based on establishing genuine relationships and trust between members of the oversight. While this step may appear self-evident in a group with multiple partners, it may be challenging to enact in practice. Some obstacles to relationship-building as listed by CCIs include navigating the self-interests of involved parties; “cultural, historical, racial, or legal barriers”; and even financial costs to maintaining such connections (Kubisch, et al., 2010). In **CCAs**, developing connections between stakeholders may necessitate a dedicated backbone team who can ensure shared power and mediate between players of varying sizes (e.g., grassroots and institutions). The presence of such a team in itself demonstrates the sheer ongoing effort required to build and maintain relationships (Gloger, n.d.).

Further, this relationship-building may also be vital considering that personal emotions could arise in the oversight’s work. Some participants mentioned prior negative experiences they have had with the board, such as a failure to follow through with promises or the feeling of being used. If individuals involved with recommendation 10.3 have similar experiences coming in or throughout their time as part of the oversight, it is possible that neglecting to address such sentiments may cause further divide and less productivity for this intentionally collaborative partnership.

“Maybe there’s poor relationships between certain partners and the board already that I’m not aware of — that could be possible. [...] I think, could they bring that, [or] heated emotions into their decision-making and thoughts about how to implement things – maybe based on bias or their own lived experience.”

-HWDSB staff

In addressing this, some participants provided ideas of how to build relationships between members. This included a commitment to being in the same room, having transparent and open dialogue, being empathetic, and meeting outside of scheduled meetings (i.e., going out for coffee to learn about their fellow members beyond the context of their role on the oversight). Similarly, the **community organizing** model proposes creating time for social events to build a sense of community amongst members (Basics of community organizing, n.d.). This team bonding is also in line with the **Rainbow Framework's** recommendation to strengthen social capacity via supportive relationships (*Rainbow Framework*, n.d.). Importantly, trust is formed when a person or group or institution acts on their commitments, which may appear simple on paper, but can be challenging and take time to enact in reality; however, that show of dedication is precisely what makes it so crucial.

"All of the players, they have to connect first. So I need to know names, need to know what you're about. Do we share values? Do we share approach? Starts with that."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

This relationship-building could also help in addressing a potential tension related to the different positions and the perceived differences in power that those positions hold. For example, if the oversight were to involve a student and a principal, how might those individuals interact with one another and also with the group at large?

4.4.3 How to encourage member attendance and engagement?

Communication between oversight members

A major theme from the interviews was the importance of having clear communication. Some participants involved in Safe Schools connected a lack of communication to decreased attendance (as individuals did not know when meetings were happening) and engagement (through feelings of frustration).

For example, in an instance of Safe Schools work, multiple participants cited a potential technical issue with the emailing list leading to miscommunication, wherein community members never heard back after signing up for working groups. Some participants said that they were too busy to follow-up; and for those that did, many did not hear back. This situation caused individuals to not know if they were still part of Safe Schools work.

"During those initial meetings there was, like, 'Hey, we should have working groups. Hey, fill in this survey, which topics do you like?' And I filled in the topics I liked, and then I never heard anything about it. [...] Somehow, everything was lost in translation for me. Maybe it's all in my junk inbox right now. I don't know."

-Individual affiliated with community organization

"I tried emailing them, but I didn't get an email back. So I'm not entirely sure about that. [...] I don't think I am involved in Safe Schools anymore?"

-Student

"I signed up for every single one of them, because I want to be part of the whole process. [...] I put my name down for every one, and there was a huge lapse where I didn't hear about any of them, so I thought, 'Oh, they've forgotten about me.'"

-Community advocate

In addition, participants mentioned that if they happened to be absent from one or a few Safe Schools Advisory or working group meetings, they were not updated on what they had missed, or would find that a meeting agenda was different from what was previously discussed. As such, participants suggested that it may be useful to have meeting minutes shared with all members so they could be caught up and follow along.

While this theme may have originated from previous Safe Schools work, it is still pertinent to recommendation 10.3 moving forward in terms of highlighting how attendance and engagement can be affected by a breakdown in communication. A few participants proposed that resolving such miscommunication may be achieved by relaying with a single point person. Others stated that they merely wanted communication for Safe Schools to be done well. This range of suggestions may demonstrate a need to build capacity in order to ensure that proper communication is consistent for all involved.

"It's very difficult when there's one person saying one thing, another saying another thing, the third person being, like, 'What's happening?' So definitely one person doing the work of knowing who's doing what [...] because you'd lose track very quickly of what's happening."

-Student

Mutual meeting times

Another potential barrier to member attendance and engagement that was raised by participants was the lack of mutual meeting times. For example, if an individual wanted to be part of the oversight but was unable to do so due to conflicting schedules, they may feel left out after missing several meetings. To address this issue of availability, participants suggested:

- scheduling meetings based on community members' availabilities, not necessarily based
- on the working day (particularly if recommendation 10.3 is to be truly community-led);
- having a regular meeting time to make planning for a meeting or event predictable (otherwise, there may be a risk of extended time passing without a next confirmed meeting and hence individuals losing interest);
- if dates change, sharing those dates in advance (e.g., more than a week's notice) to allow
- members to prepare for meetings; and
- holding two of the same meeting at different times to accommodate for various schedules (with the caveat that what happens in both meetings is communicated to all members).

"I am on the Safe Schools Advisory as well. Haven't been able to successfully attend a meeting, though, because of the dates that it lines up."

-Parent

Visibility of recommendation 10.3

An often-cited barrier to participation during the interviews was simply a lack of awareness surrounding Safe Schools. Participants remarked that there were individuals they knew whom either did not know about this work or, if they did know about Safe Schools and were interested, did not know if or how they could be involved. As this challenge was apparent with Safe Schools overall, it may also occur specifically with recommendation 10.3. In particular, this may be an issue if a main objective of the oversight is to directly incorporate diverse perspectives as part of its membership. An idea provided by a participant to increase both the community and staff's knowledge of Safe Schools was to organize a round of promotion by directly going into communities. Another participant suggested leveraging upon existing models that already do that (e.g., charette) and adapting those models to the purposes of the oversight.

"The Safe Schools piece, it's been almost a year, and I still think there's some people that aren't aware that it's happening, or that they could join — and maybe they can't."

-Parent

"If there was advertising, things like that, I think a lot of the community would want to [join]. [...] I don't know the exact statistics, but I know most people have been bullied, or have witnessed someone being bullied that's close to them, so they might not want to necessarily join and put it forward, but I think they'll definitely want to know what's going on with it. So I think if more of the community knew about it, they might want to help out."

-Student

"I think you really need to make sure that staff are aware of the opportunities available to them for learning, and to potentially lead, or co-lead, or co-learn around some of the topics."

-HWDSB staff

"If you do it within the wards, you know, make it more intimate, have it more about the actual community. [...] If you really tap into the heart, I think you'd get a better reaction."

-Parent

"Let's think outside of the box for how we want to work with people. Do we go to them instead of having them come to us? I think there's a lot of ways. [...] And it goes back to so many models of, like, the Sage Model, or a lay health educator model, or a charette model from engineering."

-Parent

Accessibility

Accessibility may also be a barrier to participation for certain populations or individuals. The first topic that arose under the consideration for accessibility was that of language, with participants encouraging appropriate wording for all members, from staff to students and other potential members of the oversight. For example, any technical terms used could be accompanied by definitions, footnotes, or a glossary, and/or the opportunity to ask questions and talk through terms. As well, translation into multiple languages may be appropriate depending on membership, or in communications shared with the general public.

"You can get lost in the words. Like, 'This makes no sense. I can't even process half of this.' So something easier to read would help."

-Student

"Especially when you think about it, we're talking about bullying and communities. [...] [Some new immigrants] don't speak our language, they come from a different culture, they don't feel like they belong. Why? Because we're not making it accessible. They can't be part of these meetings, they can't be part of these conversations, they're being sent documents in English, and if they want it in a different language, they have to go searching for it."

-Parent

The second topic under accessibility was technology, which has the potential to reduce barriers to participation but at the moment may not be fully taken advantage of (e.g., closed captioning may be available but not used). If the oversight were to leverage upon technology in its internal work (e.g., virtual meetings) or external work (e.g., collecting data to evaluate Safe Schools initiatives), then a level of digital literacy (and corresponding training) needs to be considered.

"I feel like [the board is] not using technology enough to help connect those people. [...] I just feel like from an accessibility standpoint, that comes into the bullying part, too."

-Parent

5. Conclusion

The main takeaways from this work are as follows:

- pre-work for the oversight, specifically with regards to its function (the purpose of and expectations surrounding recommendation 10.3), must be conducted before its form can be delineated;
- while there is work to be done ahead, there are also lessons from previous years of Safe Schools work that may be valuable to investigate; and
- recommendation 10.3 (and Safe Schools in general) does not and cannot rely upon any one group to be actualized. Rather, a joint, reciprocal partnership between individuals, organizations, communities, institutions, and governments will be key in collectively tackling bullying for the safety and wellbeing of students in Hamilton.

5.1 Limitations and avenues for future work

A limitation of the work for the secondary research was the usage of Google as a database, which indicates that some of the sources found may be biased from Google's algorithm, as the search engine recalls and displays results based on user data. Moving forward, using a database that does not track the user's data (such as DuckDuckGo) may aid in reducing potential biased results from Google.

For the interviews, a major limitation was the fact that participants were individuals who had previously expressed interest in Safe Schools, and/or were involved with HWDSB in some other capacity. As such, in missing a key subpopulation of individuals who may not be as connected to and/or not want to be associated with work by HWDSB, the study's sample may not be representative of the wider population in Hamilton. Thus, there may be value in validating the findings from this study with a more diverse sample.

As well, while data was a prominent theme in both the interviews and literature review, participants only spoke on a broad level of the overall importance of collecting and reporting on data, whereas the literature thoroughly elaborated on the processes by which that might manifest. Moreover, considering that measurement systems were a major theme in the previous work by Dulai et al., future work may consider elucidating this theme with community members, HWDSB staff, and the larger city of Hamilton in greater detail. For example, in future discussions between the board and the larger community, individuals could be asked about what performance indicators, outcome measures, and/or types of data would be most appropriate for the oversight to use in measuring the progress and process of Safe Schools.

6. Appendices

Appendix A. Summary of secondary research findings

A brief description of the themes from the secondary literature review is as follows (within the report itself, these themes and their corresponding models have been integrated directly into the primary research).

Dedication of Resources and Capacity Development

As found in the literature, several models indicated the importance of dedicated resources, including human, financial, community, advocacy, and others. The concept of capacity development is heavily related to the dedication of resources as, in order to develop capacity, more resources are often required.

Cohesion and Agreement among Stakeholders, including Community

The literature stressed ensuring that all members and/or stakeholders involved are on the same page. This could be with regards to the outcomes being measured, agendas, any visions for the oversight structure, purpose(s) of oversight, usage of resources, and more. To facilitate cohesion and agreement, some methods described were to actively involve the community, gain support from external stakeholders, and reach agreement on outcome measures.

Adaptability and Openness to Learning

This theme refers to the adaptability and willingness of the group to constantly learn throughout the oversight's implementation and maintenance. Data collected before oversight implementation and during the oversight's operation may be used to adapt approaches, as well as align resources towards measures that are shown to be effective.

Involving the Broader Community

Involvement of the broader public (that is, members outside of the institution or the oversight board) could be found in many forms in the literature, such as direct involvement of the public through community-led social audit, the inclusion of businesses and organizations, or the importance of maintaining communication with the public through community progress reporting.

Independence

Many models highlighted the importance of the oversight board being independent from the organization or institution they are overseeing. Furthermore, they state that the oversight's independence should be clearly communicated to the public using explicit language such as an "independent advisory" or "independent board." This transparency may also allow for greater trust to be built between the oversight and the community.

Logistical Details

Key logistical details in models typically explained "who," "what," "when," "where," and "how." This included, but was not limited to, "who" is included on the board (members explicitly relaying their role in the group and the expertise they may bring); "when" meetings are carried out (meeting frequency, time of day for meetings, meeting duration), and "how" meetings are conducted (common agenda).

Utilisation of Data Collection and Outcome Measures

Models, particular the Rainbow Framework, noted that the methods of utilising data, and also the intended goal(s) of collecting and reporting on outcome measures, should be established prior to the oversight beginning its operations. Outcome measures serve to inform the group of its progress, so resources may be allocated towards avenues for improvement. Another point was how findings should be reported on a regular basis (e.g., annually) and accessible shared with the community.

Distinct Ideas

While the previous themes had been found in several models, there were also notable ideas introduced in only one or very few of the sources that were explored. However, these were reported here as there were "distinct" or "stand-out" due to reasons such as similarity of the context to the HWDSB, or the presentation of ideas and perspectives that may be less traditional in K-12 education. The first idea was the use of negotiation, confrontation, and pressure to gain support from relevant stakeholders (Cabaj & Weaver, 2016). The second stand-out theme was the idea of providing tangible power to the oversight to act out decision (Gloger, n.d.). In this way, the group may not be perceived as limited to a performative role, and members may feel supported to make changes, introduce policy, and enact other recommendations as they see fit.

Appendix B. Themes involving the secondary research

Appendix B.1 Form before function

Category, Theme or Subtheme	Involves Secondary Research?
Form before function	Yes
Co-development	Yes
Community-led (in “Co-development”)	Yes
Shared definitions (in “Co-development”)	Yes
Setting boundaries (in “Co-development”)	Yes
Accountability in addressing bullying (in “Why have oversight?”)	Yes
Action-based (in “Why have oversight?”)	Yes
Timelines and adaptability (in “Why have oversight?”)	Yes
Supporting Safe Schools work (in “Why have oversight?”)	Yes
Funding and resources (in “Ensuring buy-in”)	Yes
Partnership (in “Ensuring buy-in”)	Yes
Competing interests (in “Ensuring buy-in”)	Yes

Appendix B.2 Design considerations

Category, theme, or subtheme	Involves secondary research?
Important stakeholders (in “Who might be involved?”)	Yes
Power dynamics (in “Who might be involved?”)	Yes
Listening to and amplifying voices of groups (in “Who might be involved?”)	No
Recruitment (in “Who might be involved?”)	Yes
Compensation (in “Who might be involved?”)	Yes
Backbone team (in “Who might be involved?”)	Yes
Length of involvement (in “Who might be involved?”)	Yes
Group size (in “Who might be involved?”)	Yes
What might the oversight’s format look like?	N/A
Checking progress and process of Safe Schools (in “What tasks might the oversight undertake?”)	Yes
Monitoring the oversight itself (in “What tasks might the oversight undertake?”)	Yes
Involvement of the general public (in “What tasks might the oversight undertake?”)	Yes
Meeting frequency (in “When might meetings take place?”)	Yes
Time of day (in “When might meetings take place?”)	Yes
Where might meetings be held?	Yes

Appendix B.3 Operational considerations

Category, theme, or subtheme	Involves secondary research?
How might decisions be made?	Yes
Data (in “How might decisions be made?”)	Yes
Collaborative culture (in “How might members interact with each other?”)	Yes
Building relationships (in “How might members interact with each other?”)	Yes
Communication between oversight members (in “How to encourage member attendance and engagement?”)	No
Mutual meeting times (in “How to encourage member attendance and engagement?”)	No
Visibility of recommendation 10.3 (in “How to encourage member attendance and engagement?”)	No
Accessibility (in “How to encourage member attendance and engagement?”)	No

Appendix C. List of organizations and individuals that participants suggested contacting (organized alphabetically)

- Affiliated Services for Children & Youth
- BGC Hamilton-Halton
- Empowerment Squared
- Equity Network
- Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion
- Hamilton Coalition for Bullying Prevention and Intervention (defunct), including Judith Bishop and Dwayne Dahl
- Hamilton Encampment Support Network
- Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction
- Hamilton Students for Justice
- Jennifer Pearson
- John Howard Society of Hamilton, Burlington & Area
- Liberty for Youth
- Social Planning & Research Council of Hamilton
- Tracy Vaillancourt
- Voices Against Bullying

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