SAFE SCHOOLS:
Bullying Prevention
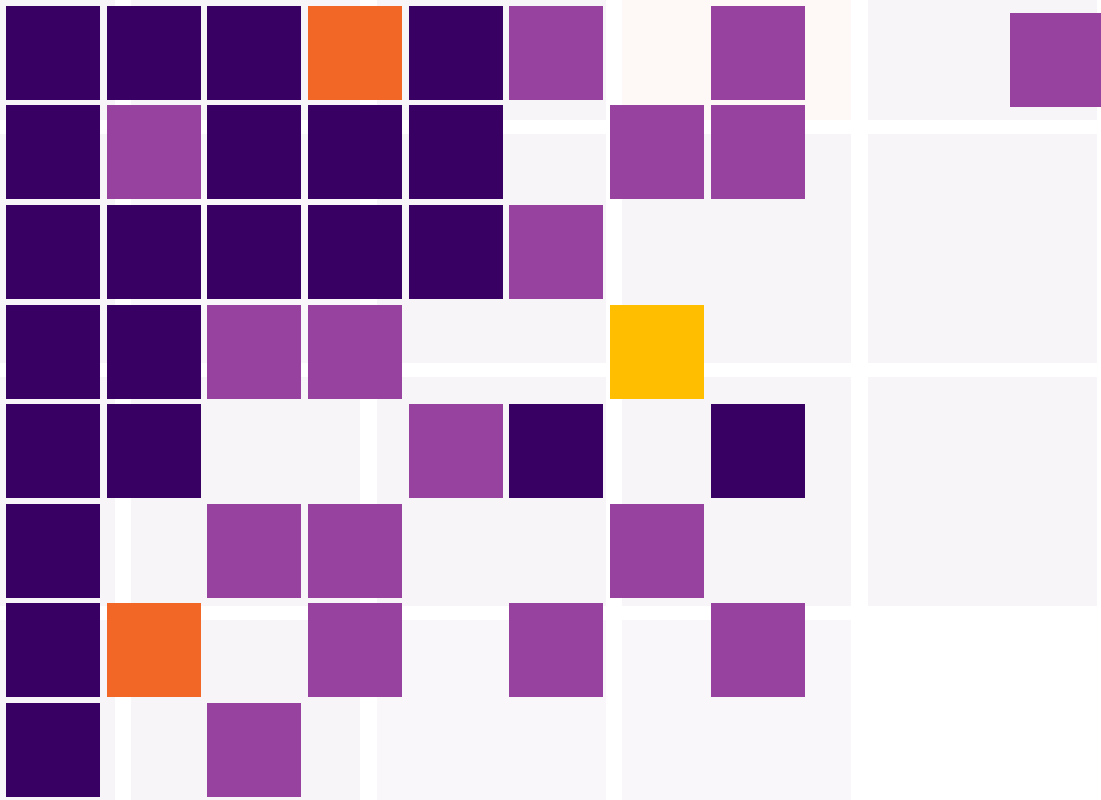**& Intervention**
R E V I E W   P A N E L

2021

Building Healthy Relationships and an Inclusive, Caring Learning Environment

Final Report of the HWDSB Safe Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel

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Dedication

We are grateful and encouraged by how deeply Hamilton has engaged in the conversations about bullying prevention and intervention. The insights, solutions and stories — at times difficult to hear — have directly informed our student-centred recommendations.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) includes the rights for children to be protected from violence, abuse or neglect; to have access to an education that enables children to fulfil their potential; and to be able to express their opinions and be listened to (UN General Assembly, 1959).

Our goal is that our recommendations, informed by lived experience and insights shared with us and by lessons drawn from research and best practices, will serve as a guide for HWDSB and beyond to enact sustainable changes that will guarantee the UNCRC rights for every child.

The tragic death of Devan Bracci-Selvey propelled this deeper look into the broader concern of bullying in HWDSB. We dedicate this report to the memory of Devan, to his family, and to all those who suffer as a result of bullying.

— Dr. Jean Clinton, Brenda Flaherty and Dr. Gary Warner, Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel

Executive summary

Following the death of Devan Bracci-Selvey, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) trustees created the Safe Schools: Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel (hereafter referred to as the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel or the review panel for short). The review panel's purpose was to gather qualitative and quantitative community feedback, summarize research and create recommendations for HWDSB, the Hamilton community and government to address bullying.

About bullying

Bullying is a systemic issue that causes significant harm. It affects children, youth and adults around the world and is prevalent locally in HWDSB and across Canada. Bullying is a subcategory of aggression that is characterized by intentionality, repetition and power imbalance.

Bullying victimization is an enduring experience of psychological distress caused by interpersonal aggression. Bullying victimization is associated with low self-esteem, loneliness, depression, anxiety, suicidality, psychosis, disordered eating, and a host of somatic complaints and physical health problems. Bullying victimization also affects students' cognitive processes, such as memory and the ability to pay attention, which makes it difficult for bullied students to learn and actively participate at school.

Over 30% of Canadian students are bullied by their peers on an occasional basis and from 7 to 10% are bullied daily. According to UNICEF (2017), Canada ranks in the top five of 31 economically advanced countries for highest bullying victimization rates. The prevalence of bullying victimization among HWDSB students is very high. According to the HWDSB Safe School Survey that was conducted for this review, 59.8% of surveyed students reported being bullied by others at any rate (pre-COVID) and 19.7% reported being bullied frequently (pre-COVID).

HWDSB's experience of bullying is sadly typical of school boards across the country. What the review panel has learned through this deep examination of one school board in Canada yields insights that are relevant for all.

Bullying prevention

Developmentally attuned and effective bullying prevention programs for all students from kindergarten through Grade 12, together with interventions for students with the highest needs, will have substantial benefits in terms of mental health, social wellbeing, productivity, and crime prevention over the lifespan.

Bullying prevention programs should be evidence-based, whole-school and multi-tiered. The best outcomes are obtained from intervention programs that:

- Are multi-tiered, leveraging universal, selective and indicated programs and activities.
- Are school-wide and address the social environment, culture and climate with clear bullying prevention policies.
- Include data to monitor progress.
- Engage parents, guardians, caregivers and families.
- Incorporate evidence-based programs and supports.

Results of community consultation and online survey

Between February 12 and November 1, 2020,[1] the review panel conducted 18 public consultations and met with nine groups affiliated with HWDSB. Through these consultations, members of the panel heard the collective lived experiences, thoughts and opinions of Hamiltonians, many of whom bravely shared difficult personal stories of bullying.

In addition to the public consultations, the review panel conducted an online survey of students in Grades 4 to 12, parents, guardians, caregivers and staff members. The survey looked at bullying victimization, bullying perpetration, witnessing bullying, school safety and overall experiences.

In total, the review panel heard from over 10,000 people, including more than 1,000 community consultation participants and approximately 9,400 survey respondents. There were 10 high-level findings from the qualitative and quantitative data:

1. Bullying is a problem in the Hamilton community. Students, educators, parents, guardians and caregivers are all experiencing bullying and it is affecting their mental health and well-being.

2. Certain groups experience bullying at higher rates. For example, the survey findings from across all surveyed populations (students, parents/guardians/caregivers and HWDSB staff) show HWDSB students who identify as gender diverse and/or Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ reported the highest rates of bullying victimization. This is further supported by the qualitative community consultation findings. In addition, a common theme emerging from the community consultations was that many students are experiencing bullying because of their race or ethnicity, newcomer status, disability, religion and Indigenous identity. This indicates a need for an intersectional approach to bullying prevention and intervention.

3. In some instances, there is a culture of fear in HWDSB that prevents people from reporting or taking action on incidents of bullying.

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1. All consultations and the final report were to be completed by May 31, 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all community consultations scheduled after March 15 were postponed until fall 2020 and conducted online. The due date for the final report was moved to January 2021 to accommodate the later sessions as well as seek feedback from the community on the draft recommendations.

4. People at all levels of the board, from trustees to students, wish to create a culture of caring where people are supported and feel like they belong and can learn.

5. Participants value partnerships with parents, guardians, caregivers, experts, communities and community groups. They see these partnerships as crucial to helping children and youth feel like they belong and to addressing bullying.

6. Participants want clear and transparent communication and to know that their voices are heard and valued.

7. Participants want robust and clear policies and procedures that are easy to access, consistently followed by HWDSB and monitored for effectiveness.

8. Both schools and the community need to be well resourced, and those resources need to be culturally appropriate, of high quality and distributed equitably to support the mental health and well-being of children, youth, parents, guardians, caregivers, teachers and community members.

9. The majority of parents, guardians, caregivers and staff who participated in the HWDSB Safe School Survey were satisfied with the steps taken in schools to prevent bullying and HWDSB's efforts to make schools a safe place. However, approximately one-third of parents, guardians, caregivers and staff were not satisfied with the steps taken by the school board to prevent bullying among students. This finding, considered alongside the consultation findings and the reported rates of bullying in schools, indicates significant improvement is still needed.

10. Participants want accountability and transparency through tracking and public reporting of data and statistics.

Recommendations

The review panel made 11 broad recommendations based on advice from experts and findings from the community consultation and survey. Each recommendation has detailed action steps that are outlined in Chapter 6. A summary of each recommendation follows.

RECOMMENDATION #1: Increase student ownership and seek out and listen to student perspectives

Students have knowledge and expertise to contribute and should be recognized, valued and engaged as critical partners in the work ahead. As such, the review panel recommends HWDSB create the conditions for students to share ownership of their classroom, school climate and learning. The panel also recommends HWDSB elevate and assure safe conditions for student voices, agency and leadership.

RECOMMENDATION #2: Involve parents, guardians and caregivers in bullying prevention and response in meaningful ways

In recognition of the critical role played by parents, guardians and caregivers, the review panel recommends HWDSB ensure parents, guardians and caregivers are meaningfully and continuously engaged in bullying prevention and intervention processes and initiatives at the student, school and system levels. This includes strengthening parent communication protocols specific to bullying reporting, intervention and responding.

RECOMMENDATION #3: Develop multi-tiered supports and programming

To ensure the best outcomes for students, the review panel recommends HWDSB work with bullying prevention experts, students, parents, guardians, caregivers and educators to develop a multi-tiered system of bullying prevention and intervention programs and protocols. The panel recommends that the programming and protocols are field-tested in 2021–2022 and rolled out across the system in subsequent years.

RECOMMENDATION #4: Support schools so they can establish their own bullying prevention and intervention plans

To ensure a safe and supportive learning environment for all students and staff, the review panel recommends HWDSB provide schools with the time, information, tools and resources to develop, implement and evaluate their own school-led, student-centred bullying prevention and intervention plans. These plans should use the PREVNet whole-school approach (Pepler & Craig, 2014) and draw from specialized bullying supports and resources as needed.

RECOMMENDATION #5: Examine special education practices from a student-centred learning perspective

Students with special education needs and their families frequently shared that they felt "othered" and excluded from learning environments. To ensure inclusive learning environments, the review panel recommends HWDSB continue to review and refine the special education plan, in particular the use of self-contained classes,[2] in keeping with research and best practices on student learning, belonging and engagement.

RECOMMENDATION #6: Review policies and procedures from equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression perspectives

In recognition of historical and present-day systemic discrimination against identified groups, the review panel recommends HWDSB examine existing bullying policies and procedures, including guidelines and codes of conduct, through the following lenses: equity, inclusiveness, anti-oppression and anti-racism (including anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism and anti-Islamophobia). This examination should be performed in collaboration with others and pay particular attention to HWDSB's policies and procedures for bullying reporting and responding.

RECOMMENDATION #7: Ensure policies and procedures are followed consistently

To ensure a safe and positive school climate[3] for all students and staff, the review panel recommends that HWDSB address inconsistent adherence to existing bullying prevention and intervention policies, practices and guidelines, including codes of conduct.

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2. A self-contained or special education class is one of the options that may be considered by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee when making a placement decision for a student identified as an exceptional pupil. Categories and exceptionalities include behavioural, communicational, intellectual and multiple.

3. A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included and accepted, and positive behaviours and interactions are actively promoted. Principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in the learning environment to support a positive school climate and a culture of mutual respect (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018a).

RECOMMENDATION #8: Set the foundation for a culture of caring

To guide the necessary organizational culture change to one of pervasive caring, accountability and transparency, the review panel recommends that HWDSB create a commitment statement with clear and measurable goals specific to bullying prevention and intervention; develop core organizational values that embrace a culture of caring; and establish ongoing monitoring and transparent reporting processes specific to bullying and positive school climate. These should be developed with students.

RECOMMENDATION #9: Strengthen the leadership skills needed for culture change

Meaningful change happens from the top down and bottom up. Therefore, the review panel recommends HWDSB review their leadership strategy to ensure it includes training and coaching focused on the knowledge and skills necessary to bring about a sustained culture of caring and accountability, with emphasis on modelling the behaviours desired for students.

RECOMMENDATION #10: Work with a wide range of community partners

Recognizing that bullying is a community issue with shared responsibility, the review panel recommends HWDSB set clear, publicly available goals that show how the board will actively build new partnerships and further develop existing partnerships within and across Hamilton to address bullying and ensure a positive school climate.

RECOMMENDATION #11: Ask the Ministry of Education for support

To support conditions that prioritize safe and accepting schools, the review panel recommends HWDSB seek commitment from the Ministry of Education to provide school boards with the resources required to ensure school board plans can be thoroughly developed, implemented and sustained.

1. Introduction

On October 7, 2019, Devan Bracci-Selvey was killed by another student behind Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School. Although many details about his death remain unclear, friends and family reported that Devan had been a victim of persistent bullying.

Since Devan's tragic death, the Hamilton community has come forward with concerns about bullying both in the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) and the greater Hamilton community. This report, prepared by the HWDSB Safe Schools: Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel (hereafter referred to as the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel, or the review panel for short), is one of several ways the board is responding to the concerns of the community. Using the findings and recommendations from this report, HWDSB has committed to re-examining their bullying prevention and intervention practices and making positive culture and well-being a priority for all HWDSB students and staff.

1.1 Purpose of this document

On Monday October 28, 2019, HWDSB trustees approved the following motion:

> *That a Bullying Prevention & Intervention Review Panel be created with a focus on bullying prevention, intervention, reporting, and responding in order to provide independent feedback and recommendations to the Director of Education and shared with the Board no later than May 31, 2020. [This deadline was later changed to January 25, 2021 due to COVID-19.]*

This document is the outcome of that resolution. The purpose of the document, as outlined in the review panel's terms of reference, is to report on the findings of the process. This includes:

- Compiling community feedback gathered through public consultations and surveys.
- Being attentive to systemic issues and root causes.
- Summarizing the most current research and best practices in a literature review.
- Creating recommendations for HWDSB, government, and the community based on this feedback and research.

Given the sensitivity of the investigation surrounding the death of Devan Bracci-Selvey, the specific details of his death are outside the scope of this report, as is investigating any other specific incidents of bullying.

HWDSB has committed to making the review panel's report public. This transparency is important for strengthening public trust and can also encourage more sharing, openness and creativity between HWDSB and members of its communities. It also enables other school boards to benefit from the lessons learned at HWDSB.

But a public report also comes at a price. Critical comments are important to understanding the extent of the problem and how HWDSB can move forward in the most productive way, but focus should not rest exclusively on the negative feedback captured in this report. The review panel found that many HWDSB schools and staff are doing commendable work and there is much to build on.

The challenge is to use the tragic event that prompted the review panel's work as an opportunity for HWDSB and its staff to work together with all of its key stakeholders — students, parents, guardians,

caregivers, unions, and community organizations and groups — to address the root causes of bullying and enhance the ability of every student to thrive in a safe, supportive, accepting and inclusive environment.

1.2 Review panel members

In November 2019, HWDSB established the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel. Trustees asked three respected community members with knowledge of equity, mental health, organizational management and board governance to form the review panel. As none of the review panel members are current or former employees of HWDSB, they can, as mandated, act independently to make recommendations for safer, more welcoming schools. The review panel members are:

Dr. Jean Clinton, a Clinical Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences in the division of Child Psychiatry at McMaster, is renowned nationally and internationally as an advocate for children's issues.

Brenda Flaherty is the former Executive Vice-President and COO of Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS) and current Assistant Professor in McMaster University's School of Nursing. She is serving as past chair of YMCA Canada and has extensive board experience in a variety of health, community development and well-being organizations.

Dr. Gary Warner, an emeritus professor and former administrator at McMaster University, is an award-winning, dedicated and respected member of the Hamilton community with more than 45 years of experience with issues related to international development, peace, poverty, human rights, anti-racism, immigration and social justice.

The review panel was tasked with gathering community input and feedback through stakeholder consultations to inform a final report with key recommendations. HWDSB contracted KOJO Institute to assist with managing this part of the project, including conducting the public consultations, writing the final report, and providing expertise on equity, diversity and inclusion. Staff from KOJO Institute who were involved in the project include:

- Kike Ojo-Thompson
- Evelyn Myrie

The review panel was also instructed to make use of the most up-to-date research and evidence-informed practice when developing its recommendations. To access this knowledge, the review panel relied on four expert advisors:

- Barry Finlay
- Dr. Debra J. Pepler
- Dr. Kathy Short
- Dr. Tracy Vaillancourt

Additional details about the expert advisors and KOJO Institute staff can be found in Appendix A: Biographies.

The review panel conducted their work autonomously to provide independent recommendations to the Director of Education and HWDSB. The Director of Education's office provided coordination support. Members of the Communications and Community Engagement, Research and Analytics,

and Equity and Well-Being service departments provided support to the review panel to gather input and feedback for the final report.

The review panel reviewed the feedback from the community and the information provided by expert advisors and other key stakeholders in the context of government legislation, policies, regulations and directives, as well as in the context of the ongoing efforts, commitments and policies of HWDSB.

While students were the primary focus of the review, the impact of school-based bullying on parents, guardians, caregivers and HWDSB staff was also considered. As a group, the review panel settled on the approaches described in the next section and developed the recommendations in Chapter 6: Review panel recommendations.

1.3 Frameworks used in this report

HWDSB has committed to making this report public and prioritizing the needs of the Hamilton community. As such, the review panel has made every attempt to use clear language to accurately reflect what was heard from the community and describe the process used to create the recommendations.

The review panel has tried to accurately capture the honest and painful experiences of students, parents, guardians, caregivers and community members who have been affected by bullying. The review panel also wanted to highlight the positive work being done by student groups, community partners, parents, guardians, caregivers, teachers, educational assistants, guidance counsellors, and the staff at HWDSB. Three examples of this work are the Mental Health Strategy, HWDSB Equity Action Plan, and Indigenous Education and Indigenous Cultural Safety. By using the positive work underway as a springboard for improving how HWDSB deals with bullying, this report uses what is called a strengths-based approach. A strengths-based approach values the capacity, skills, knowledge, resilience and potential in individuals and communities. It requires the review panel to work in collaboration with the community to co-design solutions (Pattoni, 2012).

Another way to honour the voices and concerns of our community is to take a family- and child-centred approach. The Centre for Community and Child Health (2003) in Australia describes family-based care as:

- A way of working in partnership with families to help them make their own decisions.
- Being based on the idea that all families are different and there is no one right way to do things.
- Creating the best environment for children's health, development and well-being.

This report is family-centred in two ways. First, it puts the voices and needs of children and youth above all else. Second, the recommendations focus on opportunities for schools and families to work in partnership to address bullying. Bullying can affect family well-being. A family-centred approach mobilizes resources to support the whole family with interventions and strategies tailored to their individual needs.

The review panel also used what is known as an evidence-informed framework. Evidence-informed practice is the careful use of different sources of information to help make recommendations about policy and practice. Using this framework required the review panel to look at the specific context of the HWDSB, the values and needs of the community, and the best available research evidence when making decisions. This framework increased the review panel's accountability and transparency, while helping them create recommendations that will have ideal outcomes for everyone (Epstein, 2009).

Finally, all of the review panel's work is informed by an anti-oppressive and anti-racist framework. An anti-oppressive and anti-racist framework acknowledges both anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism. It also recognizes the role that different people's identities and social locations, such as race, gender, disability, income level, sexuality, gender identity and religion, may play in bullying or being bullied.

This framework acknowledges that institutions and systems, including schools, the healthcare system and the justice system, have historical and oppressive legacies, such as racism, sexism, colonialism and classism. These systems tend to benefit white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual people and disadvantage people who do not fit into these categories. It was the responsibility of the review panel to recognize that a seemingly neutral policy (for example, zero tolerance or use of alternative dispute resolution) might disproportionately harm people from marginalized and racialized communities because of these legacies. This report uses an anti-racism lens because some policies and tools designed to address school behaviour, such as suspensions and police liaison programs, have had a disproportionately harmful and ongoing impact on Black and Indigenous students (Zheng, 2020).

By building on important work already underway; being family- and child-centred; using an evidence-informed framework; and honouring the diverse identities of individuals in the Hamilton community, the review panel aimed to formulate recommendations that were realistic, had community support, and were effective in making Hamilton's schools welcoming and safer places for all.

The review panel recognizes that other school boards, academics and governments will look to this report for guidance and advice in their own efforts to tackle bullying. As such, this report includes systemic recommendations that can be applied locally but are also relevant to broader audiences.

2. Context

2.1 About the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) is a public school board that covers the Hamilton area in Ontario, Canada. There are 97 schools, almost 50,000 students and approximately 7,000 staff in the board (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Composition of the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

84 Elementary
13 Secondary
97 Schools

49,749 Students

36,631 **Elementary**
13,833 **Secondary**
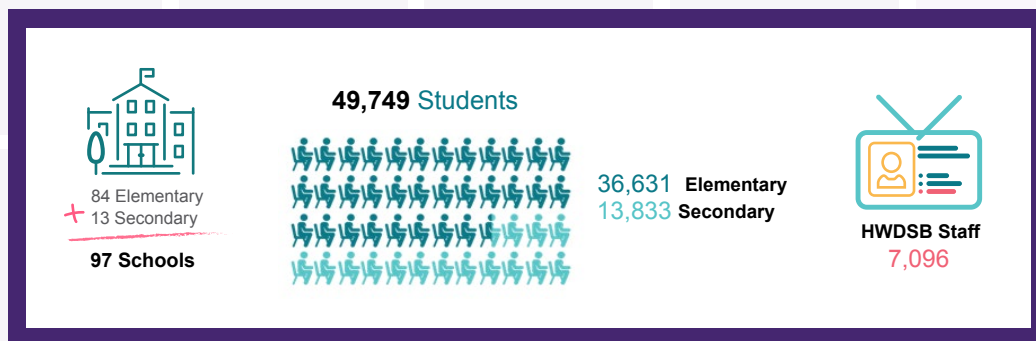
HWDSB Staff
7,096

In its 2019-2020 Annual Plan (HWDSB, 2019), the HWDSB states its priority is to "build student and staff well-being through positive climate strategies and supportive relationships" so that "all students and staff feel, safe, supported and accepted." All of the review panel's recommendations are made with this strategic priority in mind. For more information about the HWDSB, please visit: hwdsb.on.ca/about.

2.2 Definitions and key concepts

This section describes the definitions and key concepts used in the consultations, survey and recommendations. Please note, while students are the focus of this review, they are not the only individuals impacted by bullying in the HWDSB.

What is bullying?

Bullying is defined in the Education Act, 1990 as follows:

s. 1(1) "bullying" means aggressive and typically repeated behaviour by a pupil where,

> *(a) the behaviour is intended by the pupil to have the effect of, or the pupil ought to know that the behaviour would be likely to have the effect of,*

> > *(i) causing harm, fear or distress to another individual, including physical, psychological, social or academic harm, harm to the individual's reputation or harm to the individual's property, or*

> > *(ii) creating a negative environment at a school for another individual, and*

(b) the behaviour occurs in a context where there is a real or perceived power imbalance between the pupil and the individual based on factors such as size, strength, age, intelligence, peer group power, economic status, social status, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, family circumstances, gender, gender identity, gender expression, race, disability or the receipt of special education; ("intimidation")

(1.0.0.1) For the purposes of the definition of "bullying" in subsection (1), behaviour includes the use of any physical, verbal, electronic, written, or other means.

(1.0.0.2) For the purposes of the definition of "bullying" in subsection (1), bullying includes bullying by electronic means (commonly known as cyber-bullying), including,

(a) creating a web page or a blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person;

(b) impersonating another person as the author of content or messages posted on the internet; and

(c) communicating material electronically to more than one individual or posting material on a website that may be accessed by one or more individuals.

Behaviour is also defined as bullying when it occurs in a context of power imbalance based on factors such as size, strength, age, intelligence, peer group power, economic status, social status, religion, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, family circumstances, gender, gender identity, gender expression, race, disability or the receipt of special education.

In this definition, bullying can exist at the personal and systemic level. At the personal level, bullying occurs between individuals within a relationship context.[4] Systemic bullying is a generalized situation where there is a pervasive culture of aggression; bullying is prevalent and multiple perpetrators bully multiple victims on an ongoing basis.

Bullying is different from conflict. Conflict is a disagreement or argument in which both sides express their views and is a normal, even healthy, part of life when dealt with constructively. Bullying is negative behaviour where one person exerts power and control over another person. It can cause lasting harm and is not part of a healthy relationship. When children bully, they learn to use power and aggression to control and hurt others.

Forms of bullying

Bullying can happen in many different ways. A person who bullies or harms someone else repeatedly and unfairly has some advantage over the person who is being bullied. For example, the person who bullies may be older, bigger, smarter or stronger. Sometimes a group of children or youth will bully another person.

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4   It is important to recognize that this behaviour occurs in a relationship context because the individuals know each other, it happens more than once and the relationship power dynamic becomes established.

Figure 2. Types of bullying
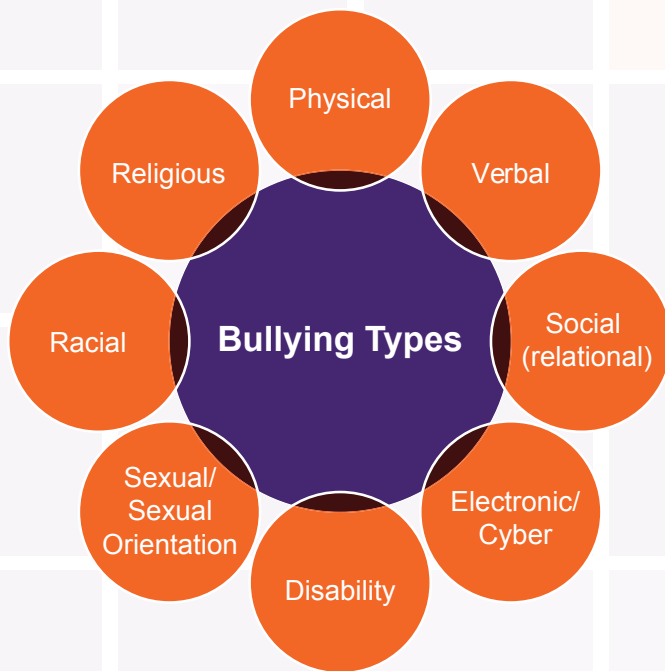
Physical bullying:

- May include hitting, pushing, slapping, tripping, kicking, shoving, beating up, stealing or damaging another person's property.

Verbal bullying:

- May include name-calling, mocking, insults, threats, teasing and sexist or racist comments.

Social or relational bullying:

- May include eye-rolling, excluding others from the group, gossiping, spreading rumours or images, humiliating others, making hurtful comments verbally or electronically, and damaging another person's friendships.

Electronic or cyberbullying:

- May include creating a webpage or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person.
- Impersonating another person as the author of content or messages posted on the internet.
- Communicating material electronically to more than one individual or posting material on a website that may be accessed by more than one individual.
- Use of any social or electronic media such as email, cell phones, text, internet and web sites to threaten, harass, embarrass, socially exclude, damage reputations or friendships, or any other type of social bullying using electronic media.

Racial bullying:

- May include aggression, saying negative things and name calling directed to a person or persons because of their race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, religious beliefs or background.

Religious bullying:

- May include aggression, exclusion and negative comments directed to a person or persons because of their religious beliefs, background, dress code or observances.
- Repeatedly calling a person or persons names or making fun of their religious beliefs, background, dress code or observances.

Sexual bullying:

- May include leaving a person or persons out or treating them badly because of their gender, gender identity or gender expression.
- Repeatedly making sexist or transphobic comments or jokes.
- Touching or grabbing someone in a sexual way.

- Repeatedly spreading sexual rumours about a person or persons.

Sexual orientation-based bullying:

- May include leaving a person or persons out or treating them badly because of their sexual orientation.
- Repeatedly making crude comments about a person or persons' sexual behaviour.
- Repeatedly calling a person or persons derogatory or inappropriate names related to their sexual orientation.

Disability-based bullying:

- May include excluding a person or persons or treating them badly because of a disability or need for special education.
- Repeatedly making comments or jokes to hurt a person or persons with a disability.
- Mocking or teasing those who use assistive technology.

Bullying statistics

Bullying is a problem that affects children, youth and adults around the world. According to a 2017 report from the UNICEF Office of Research (2017), more than one in 10 children aged 11 to 15 years in rich countries had experienced bullying in the prior month (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Children aged 11–15 who had experienced bullying at least twice in the past month (%)
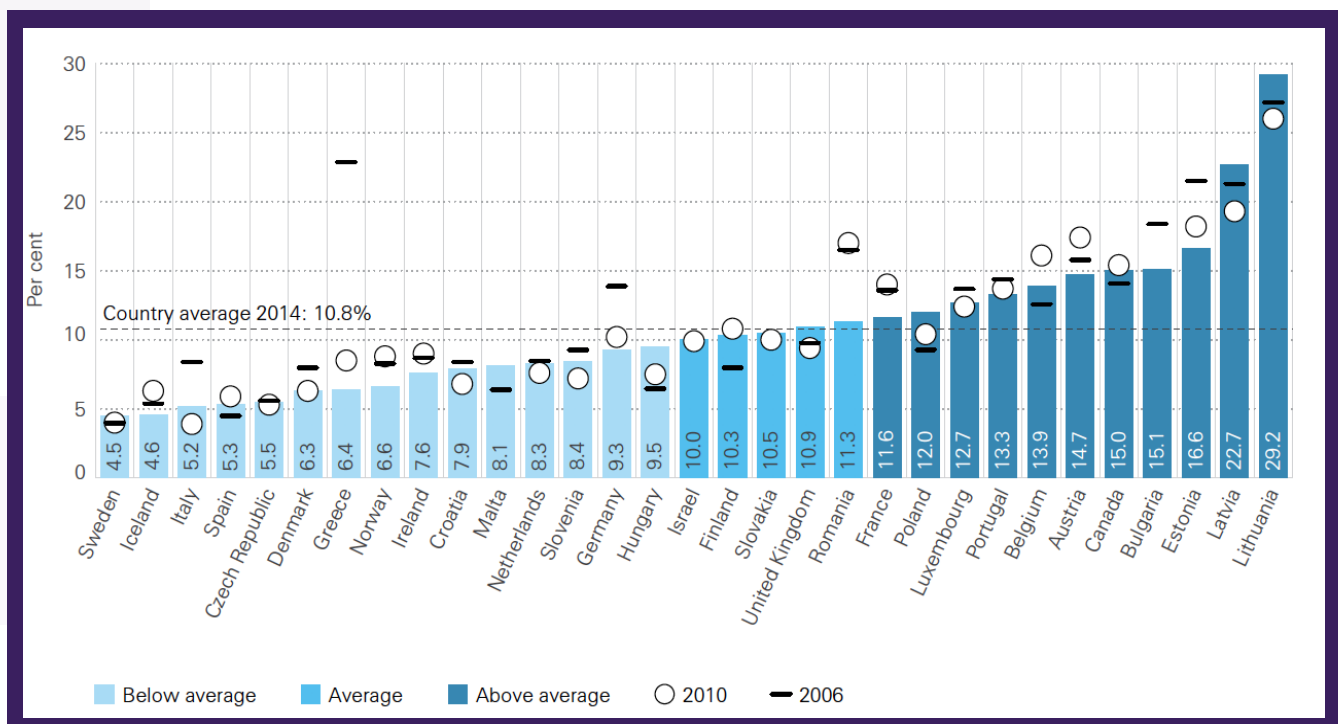
According to a recent World Health Organization (2020) survey of Canada and 46 European countries, Canada consistently ranks in the top 50% of countries for the prevalence of bullying across multiple measures (Table 1).

Table 1. Canada's ranking for bullying prevalence by age and gender

Measure	Age Group	Canada Ranking	Prevalence	
			Boys	Girls
Young people were asked how often they had been bullied by (an) other person(s) at school in the past couple of months. Response options ranged from zero to several times a week. Findings presented here show the proportions who reported being bullied at least two or three times in the past couple of months.	11-year-olds	10th	14%	18%
	13-year-olds	8th	16%	16%
	15-year-olds	7th	13%	14%
Young people were asked how often they had taken part in bullying (an) other person(s) at school in the past couple of months. Response options ranged from zero to several times a week. Findings presented here show the proportions who reported bullying others at least two or three times in the past couple of months.	11-year-olds	23rd	4%	4%
	13-year-olds	20th	3%	7%
	15-year-olds	28th	6%	3%
Young people were asked whether they had experienced anyone sending mean instant messages, wall postings or emails, or someone posting or sharing photos or videos online without their permission. Findings presented here show the proportions who had experienced such incidents at least once in the past couple of months.	11-year-olds	24th	10%	15%
	13-year-olds	20th	12%	16%
	15-year-olds	20th	10%	16%
Young people were asked whether they had taken part in sending mean instant messages, wall postings or emails, or posting or sharing photos or videos online without permission. Findings presented here show the proportions who had perpetrated such incidents at least once in the past couple of months.	11-year-olds	37th	4%	4%
	13-year-olds	36th	7%	4%
	15-year-olds	36th	7%	6%

In a 2015 Ontario study of students in Grades 7 to 12, 24% of students (about 231,000) reported being bullied at school, 13% said that they had bullied others at school, and 20% reported being cyberbullied at least once in the past year (Boak, 2017).

Locally, HWDSB has reported the following statistics related to bullying:

- Suspensions related to bullying:
- 2017–18: 129 out of 4127 total suspensions (3.1%)
- 2018–19: 113 out of 4454 total suspensions (2.5%)

- Expulsions related to bullying:
- 2017–18: 0 out of 24 (0%)
- 2018–19: <10 out of 28 (exact number supressed in accordance with HWDSB's confidentiality protocols)

- Bullying victimization (from HWDSB Safe School Survey; see Chapter 5):
- 59.8% of surveyed students reported being bullied by others at any rate and 19.7% reported being bullied frequently (pre-COVID).
- Students in Grades 6 to 8 reported the highest rates of bullying victimization (pre-COVID).

- Bullying perpetration (from HWDSB Safe School Survey; see Chapter 5):
- 24.7% of surveyed students reported bullying others at any rate and 2.8% of students reported bullying others frequently (pre-COVID).
- Most students (85.7%) reported feeling safe at school most or all of the time (pre-COVID).

- Caring adults at school (Positive Climate Survey and Middle Years Development Instrument, 2017-18):
- 41% of secondary school students reported having a caring adult at school.
- 63% of students in Grades 4 to 6 and 55% of students in Grades 7 to 8 reported having a caring adult at school.

3. Literature review summary

Three expert advisors (Tracy Vaillancourt, Ph.D., Debra Pepler, Ph.D., and Ann Farrell, Ph.D.) conducted a review of the literature for this report to ensure that the review panel had a solid understanding of the existing academic research on bullying and that the recommendations in this report were evidence-based. The complete review, including references, is available as a separate document titled Bullying in Childhood and Adolescence: Literature Review for the HWDSB Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel. What follows is a summary of the full literature review.

What is bullying?

Bullying is aggression; however, not all aggression qualifies as bullying. Rather, bullying is a subcategory of aggression that is characterized by intentionality, repetition and power imbalance. Because of the power dynamic, children and youth who are bullied have difficulties defending themselves and thus require the help of adults in their school community.

How widespread is the problem of bullying?

Over 30% of Canadian students are bullied by their peers on an occasional basis and from 7% to 10% are bullied daily. According to UNICEF, Canada ranks in the top five of 31 economically advanced countries for highest bullying victimization rates. The prevalence of bullying victimization among HWDSB students is very high, with 59.8% of surveyed students reporting being bullied by others at any rate (pre-COVID) and 19.7% reporting being bullied frequently (pre-COVID).

Why is being victimized by bullying a problem?

Bullying extends beyond the occasional fight or disagreement between peers. Bullying is an enduring experience of psychological distress caused by interpersonal aggression that is repeatedly directed at a person who has less power than their abuser. Bullying has a negative impact on virtually all aspects of functioning, both in the immediate and long term. Bullying victimization is associated with low self-esteem, loneliness, depression, anxiety, suicidality, psychosis, disordered eating and a host of somatic complaints and physical health problems. Bullying also affects cognitive processes, such as memory and the ability to pay attention, making it hard for bullied students to learn and actively participate at school. Students who are bullied by their peers view their school as an unsafe environment and they avoid attending as a way to prevent or reduce further abuse. Given this pattern of cognitive interference and disengagement, it is not surprising that bullying victimization is associated with poor academic achievement.

The list of difficulties associated with bullying is extensive because bullying damages opportunities for children to develop healthy relationships with their peers. Peer relationships are critical for healthy social-emotional development. Developmental pathways to adaptive outcomes become derailed when a child or youth's fundamental need to belong is unmet, as is the case with bullying.

What can principals and teachers do?

It is essential that school policies and procedures, as well as structures and processes, are put in place to require teachers and principals to be educated about the nature and impact of bullying and to respond effectively when they learn about bullying. This foundation for bullying prevention is needed because educators' perceptions of bullying can influence their willingness and preparedness to intervene. Educators should also be given the opportunity to be involved in the design of bullying prevention programs and in the creation of interventions and policies that foster students' empathy and support of peers.

What works to prevent and address bullying?

Bullying prevention programs should be evidence-based, whole-school and multi-tiered. Although the impact of bullying prevention and intervention programs tends to be modest, some programs have greater success than others. The best outcomes are obtained from intervention programs that:

- Are multi-tiered, leveraging universal, selective and indicated programs and activities (for example, KiVa)[5].
- Are school-wide and address the social environment, culture and climate with clear bullying prevention policies.
- Include data to monitor progress.
- Engage families.
- Incorporate evidence-based programs and supports, such as WITS, Fourth R and Roots of Empathy.

What does not work to prevent and address bullying?

Research shows that some practices that schools have used do not work to reduce bullying in schools. These include:

- Programs that include zero tolerance and conflict resolution.
- Programs that encourage youth to fight back.
- Programs that are led exclusively by youth, without supporting adult allies who collaborate on or support the peer-led initiatives.
- One-day awareness-raising events.

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5   KiVa is a bullying prevention program for students in Grades 1 to 9. It was developed in Finland and there is strong evidence for its effectiveness. Almost all schools in Finland participate in the KiVa program, which was designed to be a permanent feature of a school's bullying prevention work rather than a short-term project. KiVa is both a universal program for all students and an indicated program for students who are involved in bullying. KiVa is being used around the world and it is the world's most studied bullying prevention program. See www.kivaprogram.net for more on the program.

Why must we act now to prevent bullying in our schools?

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1959) emphasize that children have a right to an education that is free from violence and discrimination. The Ontario Education Act (1990) specifies that the first responsibility of principals and teachers is to keep students safe; the second responsibility is to educate. Bullying is a problem within the school system but it is not solely a school problem — it is clearly societal in scope. As the societal institution responsible for child and youth development, schools are mandated to focus on educating the whole child, which not only includes the capacities for numeracy, literacy and science, but also the capacities for healthy relationships.

Bullying comes with a high cost at the individual, school, community and societal levels. Developmentally attuned and effective bullying prevention programs for all students from kindergarten through Grade 12, together with interventions for students with the highest needs, will have substantial benefits in terms of mental health, social wellbeing, productivity, and crime prevention over the lifespan.

4. Community consultation

From the beginning, the central part of the review process was for the review panel to hear from members of the Hamilton community. Between February 12 and November 1, 2020,[6] the panel conducted 18 public consultations and met with nine groups affiliated with HWDSB (see Appendix B: Consultation Sessions for a complete list of consultations, including dates and locations). Participants were invited to these consultations through flyers posted in schools and information shared in newspapers, on the radio and on social media. More than 1,000 people participated in the consultation sessions.

Consultation methodology

During the public consultations, facilitators from KOJO Institute explored school safety by asking participants what they would stop, start and continue in the areas of bullying prevention, intervention, responding and reporting. For larger consultations, trained facilitators supported safe small-group conversations to ensure all participants had an opportunity to speak.

The review panel was committed to making these public consultations safe and broadly accessible to ensure they could hear as many voices as possible. As such, the following services and supports were offered at each session:

- Onsite counselling and support resources for anyone distressed by the discussions.
- High-quality child care, offered by registered Early Childhood Educators.
- Food and drinks.
- Accessible and barrier-free venues.
- Assurance from the review panel that participation was voluntary. The review panel also obtained implied consent before the sessions began.
- Assurance from the facilitators that all feedback would be anonymous.

Indigenous sessions were conducted with the guidance and presence of community Elders.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, HWDSB and the review panel decided to reschedule sessions after March 15 to the fall of 2020. These sessions were held online via Zoom to ensure the safety of all participants.

Through these consultations, members of the review panel heard the lived experiences, thoughts and opinions of Hamiltonians, many of whom bravely shared difficult personal stories of bullying.

It is important for all attendees to see their voices reflected in this report. There is a diversity of voices in the Hamilton community and, while everyone agreed there was a bullying problem, people's experiences of bullying varied, as did their proposed solutions. The review panel has done its best to present a thematic analysis while staying true to the diverse perspectives of the community. Where applicable, the narratives and perspectives of marginalized communities have been highlighted.

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6   All consultations and the final report were to be completed by May 31, 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all community consultations scheduled after March 15 were postponed until fall 2020 and conducted online. The due date for the final report was moved to January 2021 to accommodate the later sessions as well as seek feedback from the community on the draft recommendations.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part presents themes from the 18 public consultations. The second part presents themes from consultations with the nine school board-affiliated groups. The third part offers a thematic summary of suggestions, feedback and critiques from consultations. The review panel used these themes, in combination with survey feedback, best practices and current research, to create the recommendations in Chapter 6.

4.1 Findings from the public consultation

The review panel made a concerted effort to hear from as many voices in the community as possible. To do this, they hosted five general community sessions and 13 sessions with specific groups, including the Parent Involvement Advisory Committee; students with special education needs and their families and caregivers; school board partners; and members of the Black, Jewish, Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+, Muslim, alternative education, Indigenous, Newcomer and racialized communities.

To honour the courage of those participants who shared their experiences of being bullied, this chapter gives special emphasis to their stories, told in their words.

During the public consultations, five major themes emerged concerning bullying, including:

> **Theme 1:** Experiences of bullying
> **Theme 2:** Inclusion, safety and equity
> **Theme 3:** Human resources, supports and education
> **Theme 4:** Board structures and processes
> **Theme 5:** Partnerships

Sub-themes are included under each primary theme.

This chapter also presents feedback concerning the consultation process itself. This is not considered a theme because it is not directly related to addressing bullying.

Theme 1: Experiences of bullying

Throughout the public consultations, many students shared their experiences of being bullied. Many students said that when they reported their bullying they were not believed or nothing happened. According to some students, the bullying reached a point where they felt as though their only option was to fight back in self-defence, an act that students reported would often lead to unfair punishment of the bullying victim. Some of the bullying was so severe that several parents, guardians and caregivers spoke of their children dying by suicide, attempting suicide or having suicidal ideation because of bullying.

> *"I've been a foster child and a student at both boards. My greatest betrayal was adults who refused to help when I asked. We are told to reach out to adults, but they're the ones who betray us. They turn away, telling us to take care of it on our own or get a tougher skin. Then when I react in self-defence, I'm the one who's punished."*
> *— Student*

Not only did students experience bullying from their classmates, but many also experienced bullying from their teachers. Students talked about being sworn at, called names and, in some cases, experiencing transphobia from teachers. As was the case when students were bullied by classmates, students who were bullied by teachers shared that they were not believed and that the teachers did not face any repercussions for their bullying behaviour.

"I am bullied a lot. When I try to tell the principal or teachers, it is brushed off. I had horrible things said to me by a homophobic teacher, and students hurl slurs at me."
　　— Transgender student

Although bullying happens primarily to students, their parents, guardians and caregivers shared many stories in the sessions of their children being bullied and it was obvious that this bullying affected them deeply. Echoing the stories of students, parents, guardians and caregivers felt that when they reported their children's bullying experiences they were not believed. As well, parents, guardians and caregivers were frustrated that when the school did know about a bullying incident, the details of the incident were not shared with the family.

"My child had been bullied for the last year. When we started the new school year, he was bullied four out of his first five days. We're now home schooling. We've given up on the system."
　　— Parent

"My son is bullied by a sports organization he was on and was put on a suicide watch at 10. Telling didn't help. He felt punished and bullied even more."
　　— Parent

"My daughter is at home with a concussion and brain bleed after being pushed down the stairs by bullies who have been tormenting her for a long time. She had her wrist broken earlier this year. The principal has done nothing that I am aware of."
　　— Parent

In addition to their concerns about how schools deal with bullying incidents, parents, guardians and caregivers conveyed their fears for their children's safety. They told disturbing stories of weapons in their children's schools, children being threatened with weapons, sexual assault of their children, physical violence and robbery. Parents, guardians and caregivers were distressed that schools did not adequately address these reports or ignored them altogether.

"My son had a gun pulled on him and his shoes were stolen. In a scheduled meeting with the principal and the superintendent, the superintendent didn't even show up. The police liaison complained that they had too many schools to cover and they were called to three other schools in the space of time that our meeting was held."
　　— Parent

"My daughter in Grade 1 has a learning disability. She was bullied and choked at lunch. I wasn't told. The same kid has special needs, brought a fake gun to school and threatened my daughter. I was never told. My daughter had to tell me about it. She hated herself. [The] child was kicking her, knocked her off [her] chair and she banged her head. I wasn't told."
　　— Parent

Members of the Muslim community shared specific examples of bullying that was clearly rooted in Islamophobia. Participants reported hearing jokes about bombs and terrorism, girls being attacked for wearing hijabs, name calling, and being treated differently by teachers. Several examples demonstrated how intersecting identities can put a student at greater risk of bullying. One participant, who was deaf, was made fun of for their Muslim identity and the fact they wore hearing aids. Several

Muslim girls shared how they were made fun of for not participating in the "regular" activities that other female students did, such as prom and having boyfriends.

> *"I saw a girl getting her hijab pulled off. And I got in a fight with someone. I tried to ignore him but he kept making fun of my name, he said he was saying peas and curry. I told him I would tell the teacher and he said 'Stop being a snitch' and started swearing at me."*
> *— Muslim student*

> *"Every time there is a reference to explosions I can't help but look up and see all eyes glued to me looking me up and down travelling up my abaya to my hijab. I can't help but hear all the 'Allahu Akbar' being whispered across the classroom."*
> *— Muslim student*

Both teachers and students from the racialized and Black communities shared how they experienced bullying, discrimination and isolation because of their racial identities. Multiple students said they had been called the "N-word" in school. They described being stereotyped, for example, being called an "angry Black person" or having assumptions made about them because of stereotypes of Black masculinity. Members of the Black community reported having their cultural expressions, such as hairstyles, dress and mannerisms, policed by teachers who held white cultural expression as the norm. Members of the racialized and Black communities also felt teachers often made no real effort to prevent bullying of racialized and Black children and youth.

> *"… in terms of my work with kids who are bullied, I know a lot of kids say that when teachers see the Black kids, they think of them as just that, Black kids. Some teachers that I have worked [with] are very prejudice[d]. That was an issue with them."* *— Teacher*

> *"My child came home crying and angry because someone had called him the 'N-word' and nothing had been done. I wasn't called or contacted. They want parents to be partners but we're not treated that way...Less than 3% of the kids in the public board look like me but we are suspended more than any other group. If we fight back we're the bullies. Our kids aren't encouraged to succeed and my child is pushed to fail."*
> *— Parent*

Members of the Newcomer community also shared painful stories of their children being bullied. However, unique to their experience was how their newcomer status impeded their ability to engage with the school following a bullying incident. Newcomer students felt unwelcome and that they were unfairly asked to "compete and keep up" with peers despite sometimes not speaking English as a first language. Parents, guardians and caregivers talked about language barriers and how a lack of translators made it difficult to communicate with teachers and other parents, guardians and caregivers. They described how a lack of familiarity with the school system and the appeal process meant they did not know how to advocate for their children. Many Newcomer participants reported that in their home culture it was expected to fight back against a bully; when they counselled their children to do so they were surprised to see their children get punished.

> *"A white student targeted a Black student, but the Black student got suspended 20 days at Sir John A. Macdonald [Secondary] School…No offense was proven.*

The suspension was based on a statement from one white student that a Black student had video of a bullying incident. This was not true and it was an outrageous response. The student's parents were never contacted and because they had English as a second language, they never understood the reason for the suspension in the first place and didn't understand the appeal process."
     — *Participant identity unknown*

In sessions with members of the Indigenous community, participants told many stories of their children being bullied or being bullied themselves. Parents, guardians and caregivers said the indifference and inaction of staff following a bullying incident caused their children to lose faith in or feel pushed out of the education system because the school did not care enough about them to address the bullying. Participants told stories of not being believed when they reported their bullying. One parent shared that they thought their Mohawk identity influenced how teachers treated their children, including how teachers addressed bullying incidents.

"My son used to love school and now never will again. I don't trust school or the system. My son doesn't either."
     — *Indigenous parent*

"My daughter is losing faith in this school system."
     — *Indigenous parent*

"I was bullied at Catholic school for being Indigenous and in foster care CCAS."
     — *Indigenous student*

Likewise, a number of parents, guardians and caregivers of children with disabilities shared stories of their children being bullied because of their disabilities. Some felt their children were bullied more often than children without disabilities. Some felt teachers lacked sensitivity to the role disability plays in bullying; they felt that teachers either assumed that the child was somehow at fault for the bullying because of their disability or that the disability played no role in the bullying incident.

"We are targeted more than neuro-typical children but often when we bring a report of a bullying incident our teachers don't listen to us. We have to reach out to the LRT [Learning Resources Teacher] and have them come in to meetings and force the teacher to listen to our complaints through them. I was thrown over the railing in the stairwell but my teacher dismissed it saying 'You're OK, so no worries.' I had to have the LRT come in and speak to the teacher to have this taken seriously."
     — *Student*

"My child is 6-2 and over 200 pounds, but he also has special needs. His teachers dismiss a lot of his bullying concerns and reports because they tell him he should be able to handle this. 'How can a little kid bully a big guy like you?'"
     — *Parent*

Students from the Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ community shared stories of being bullied because of their identities. For example, teachers would misgender students then not change their behaviour when corrected. Students argued that some teachers caused further harm by not believing students or telling them to "get used to it." Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ students also reported feeling "gaslighted" by teachers after a bullying experience, meaning they were made to question their own reality.

"When I was young, I experienced verbal, social and physical bullying as the only gay and out student. This included name calling, slurs and being slammed into lockers. 'Caring' adults turned away and told me I have to deal with it, get used to it or ignore it. Only when I took matters into my own hands and responded with physical violence did they pay attention — then they suspended me."
    — Student

Although the focus of this report is student experiences of bullying, Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ teachers shared similar experiences of being bullied, including not being believed when they reported bullying and having school administrators not address the problem. Additionally, Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ teachers feared reprisal if they brought up Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ issues to school administrators.

Theme 2: Inclusion, safety and equity

From a culture of fear to a culture of caring

Throughout the sessions, the review panel repeatedly heard about the need to change the culture both in individual schools and throughout HWDSB. Most worryingly, many participants described "a culture of fear" that normalized bullying between students, teachers, parents, guardians, caregivers and school administrators. Staff and students shared that they feared reprisal if they reported bullying or spoke up about systemic bullying. Teachers reported feeling powerless and unsupported by the administration. Everyone talked about a "snitches get stitches" mentality that prevented students from reporting being bullied.

Participants identified many issues that contributed to this culture of fear. Participants from marginalized communities argued that systemic oppression of marginalized and racialized communities exists in the school system. Some Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ participants also reported systemic sexism in schools; this sexism perpetuates sexist gender roles and allows a "boys will be boys" mentality to flourish. Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ students and teachers also reported feeling unsafe. One student expressed anger that their teachers couldn't speak up because of the "fear-mongering of the Ford government around sex education that forbids them to teach some areas." Another said, "I have to wonder, will this administration accept me? Be homophobic?"

Although the review panel process was meant to focus on the student experience, some teachers spoke of being bullied by other teachers and administrators, and both teachers and family members reported being bullied by parents, guardians and caregivers. Teachers reported aggressive behaviour from the parents, guardians and caregivers of students accused of bullying; family members shared experiences of being bullied by other parents, guardians and caregivers when addressing bullying incidents between their children. Both teachers and families talked about how parents, guardians and caregivers would use Facebook to cyberbully. Although some participants suggested a code of conduct or other means of communicating behavioural expectations to parents, guardians and caregivers, they recognized that schools had no means to regulate parental behaviour.

Instead of a "culture of fear," participants described their desire for a positive culture of "inclusion," "caring," and "kindness" — one where everyone is welcomed, feels a sense of belonging, has caring relationships and feels heard and supported. Participants also talked about the need for teachers, staff, parents, guardians, caregivers and communities to cooperate, reminding the review panel that "it takes a village to raise a child."

Although themes from the school board sessions are discussed at length in the next section, at this

point it is important to note that some school board-affiliated participants felt attempts were already being made to create a positive culture. They felt staff and administrators deserved credit for ongoing work to make schools safer.

> *"One of the things that is working, especially in elementary, is our caring community. We are all caring for all the students — we have a community of students that we are all responsible for. I hear in most of my schools that principals understand that and have some success creating that culture of caring community that goes beyond the classroom."*
> — *Superintendent*

> *"Moving forward with 'caring adults' – the journey along that we are starting to reach more people and develop more language [and] to form that understanding together. We are really going through the staff and reaching to all the students, asking more about who's checking in on the students. This journey is a positive one and is getting more fruitful."*
> — *Senior board leader*

Belonging, community and a culture of caring

To create a "culture of caring," participants in the community-based sessions argued for systemic changes to help students feel a sense of belonging and community. Participants acknowledged that this was a difficult task, as the responsibility to create a culture of caring lies with both schools and the community; participants were not sure how schools could influence community culture other than through partnerships with community organizations.

> *"In my opinion, staff needs to do a better job in creating a safer, accepting and supporting environment for their own students."*
> — *Student*

Parents, guardians, caregivers and students from some marginalized communities pointed to seemingly neutral choices that could weaken a sense of belonging and community in schools. Comments from Muslim participants demonstrated how even school celebrations could hinder a sense of belonging if not planned thoughtfully. For example, they felt excluded when schools celebrated Christmas and Chinese New Year but not Eid. Muslim students felt further excluded when other students bullied them for fasting during Ramadan. Muslim participants suggested HWDSB could foster a sense of belonging by allowing prayer rooms in schools. Indigenous participants had a comparable request, asking for a safe space for Indigenous students, such as a NYA:WEH cultural space.

Some parents, guardians and caregivers of students with special education needs felt that the standard curriculum treated students with special education needs as an exception and argued for a universal design curriculum to foster inclusion. Participants also argued that physically placing students with special education needs in one part of the school, in separate classes or on a separate bus, and preventing interaction with "neuro-typical" students, led to students feeling "othered."

When discussing alternative education schools, participants talked about the unique challenges faced by homeless students. A youth worker at a shelter shared how homeless youth often feel as though they do not belong anywhere, and therefore have nothing to lose if they behave badly. As such, addressing bullying in a shelter context requires unique considerations. For example, the youth worker discussed how youth in a shelter will listen when supervised but not at other times, so supervision in alternative schools is more critical to prevent bullying. They also talked about how youth in shelter protect each other in schools and mentioned that, given hierarchies in the shelter

space, some youth have learned to equate safety with being the bully.

> *"At the alternative schools, many of our students are homeless and have no one to be accountable to."*
> — *Youth worker*

To foster a sense of belonging and community, participants suggested that schools focus on building caring relationships between students and adults and valuing connection over curriculum. They suggested principals and teachers be present and actively check in with students to create a safe school space. They also saw value in schools running a variety of extra-curricular activities and clubs for students.

> *"While teachers can't influence the act of bullying, most of the time bullying won't happen right next to the teacher. Having a connection to the students could help out a lot. Most of the time, the teacher is not there when it happens immediately."*
> — *Student*

Equity, anti-oppression and anti-racism

Systemic oppression and inequity are known barriers to feelings of belonging and inclusion. Participants repeatedly stated that to create a safe learning environment for all students, both the school board and individual schools needed to do more to address oppression, inequity and racism.

Participants asked that the whole school system, including its policies and procedures, be reviewed using an anti-oppressive lens and from Indigenous perspectives to address systemic oppression and racism. In particular, Black participants were frustrated by their ongoing experiences of systemic racism. They raised issues such as the disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion of Black students; Black students being underestimated and streamed into lower, restricted and applied programs (sometimes without parental consultation); the school-to-prison pipeline; and unequal distribution of resources to "nicer schools."

> *"We know that Black kids get suspended at a much higher rate than any other race. The statistics are consistent and clear. When do we address this bias and unfair treatment?"*
> — *Participant identity unknown*

> *"We have a pipeline-to-prison system even here in Canada, but we don't acknowledge it. Why is there no advisory for this? No panel response?"*
> — *Participant identity unknown*

The existing definition of bullying may itself be the product of systemic racism and oppression and a tool for perpetuating it. Participants from marginalized communities identified several issues with the current definition of bullying, arguing that it is not an adequate term for capturing incidents involving children from marginalized groups and that perhaps some incidents currently classified as bullying should instead be labelled as sexual harassment, homophobia, hate crimes, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and racism. Racialized participants also discussed how the existing definition of bullying did not address less visible forms of racism and oppression; examples include micro-aggression, dismissing racialized student reports of bullying and denying the feelings of racialized students. Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ participants identified bullying as a social justice crisis and repeatedly brought up the importance of an intersectional understanding of bullying. They argued that being racialized, trans, differently abled or on the autism spectrum all affected a student's experiences of bullying.

"I experienced bullying. Teachers asked me repeatedly about my Afro and the comb in my hair."
— Student

Participants drew a clear connection between their experiences of racism and their feelings of safety in schools. Participants felt that, unlike white students, Black students could not be sure that approaching a teacher would lead to getting help. Participants did not feel protected in school and felt "exhausted" from trying to navigate systems and bureaucracy to get help.

"White children can go to teachers and know they will be helped. Black kids don't have that security."
— Student

To address racism and oppression, participants asked that staff be trained to understand the power imbalances inherent in their positions. They also asked the school board to take a "power with" as opposed to a "power over" approach, making it easier to partner with community support organizations and, as a result, support marginalized communities.

Participants also argued that the demographic composition of the school board was an impediment to eliminating racism and oppression. Participants asked HWDSB to diversify staff at all levels of the board by hiring teachers and board staff from the Muslim, Black, Indigenous and Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ communities. Participants also asked HWDSB to create a specific board position dedicated to addressing issues of equity, oppression and anti-Black racism. They asked for Black graduate coaches in schools and Black adults with lived experience to assist Black students.

"I cannot say as a Canadian student who grew up in Hamilton in this area that I had a teacher of colour or a racialized teacher or an Indigenous teacher or anyone other than a white hetero female ... I think we need to go beyond tokenism and really look to represent our very diverse student population."
— Participant identity unknown

"However, in my own education in Hamilton JK to Grade 12 I've never seen a Black male teacher."
— Participant identity unknown

Other barriers to addressing oppression and racism in HWDSB are the broken relationship and lack of trust between the board and members of the Black community. Participants from the Black community felt that both systemic racism and disappointing board decisions, such as cancelling a Black mentorship program without consulting the community, had severely eroded the community's trust. However, Black community members wanted to rebuild the relationship and suggested the board start by acknowledging anti-Black racism, partnering with Black communities and creating opportunities for dialogue between the board and Black communities.

Police in schools

One area that deserves special attention is the issue of special resource officers and police liaisons in schools.

By way of context, on June 22, 2020, HWDSB voted to end the Police Liaison program. This was

as a result of the advocacy of racialized, Black and Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ students, as well as students with mental health concerns. These students had argued that the historical and present-day actions of the police in Hamilton, including actions that targeted some positive space groups, did not make the police a safe partner or ally. Police officers made students feel less safe rather than increasing a feeling of safety in schools.

Knowing that the Police Liaison program had ended, participants in the community-based sessions suggested the board seek input from racialized and marginalized communities to determine which supports would be most helpful to replace police officers in schools.

Even with police removed from schools, students still felt the school board was too connected to the police.

> *"Teachers have access to the Hamilton Police Service database. Even with the police being removed physically from schools, there will still be a virtual police presence in the schools."*
> *— Student*

HWDSB does not have access to Hamilton Police Service's databases and Hamilton Police Service does not have access to HWDSB's Student Information System. There are strict laws in place that govern the sharing and disclosure of the personal information that exists in government records.[7] However, the above quote demonstrates that student perceptions of and concerns about privacy infringement reflect a lack of trust in public institutions.

In contrast, some participants advocated for more use of police in schools, citing their positive interactions with police officers, the professionalism of the police and the way police handle crises as reasons for this.

Youth voices and leadership

A common theme across almost all sessions was the importance of honouring youth voices and supporting youth leadership. Participants encouraged the review panel to listen to the voices of youth, take their input seriously and include them in creating solutions to address bullying. Students believed they should be trained in conflict resolution, restorative justice and peer mediation so they can work with their peers to address incidents of bullying and act as coaches and mentors for younger students to increase feelings of belonging.

> *"Everyone has an opinion and voice to be heard and want[s] to know that it's OK to share [an] opinion and everyone has their own point of view and their own stuff going on."*
> *— Student*

> *"Yes, we should always be a role model for others through our positive actions."*
> *— Student*

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7. The possession and control of information by Hamilton Police Service is governed by various acts of both the provincial legislature and parliament. These include the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the Provincial Offences Act, the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, and the Child and Family Services Act. HWDSB is governed by the same legislation, plus the Education Act and the Personal Health Information Protection Act. For further details, see Hamilton Police/School Board Protocol (2016) at https://www.hwdsb.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Hamilton-Police-School-Board-Protocol-2016.pdf

Theme 3: Human resources, supports and education

Improved mental health supports and resources

Throughout the review panel process, participants repeatedly spoke about the need for more and better mental health supports in schools to prevent bullying and to respond after bullying incidents. Participants spoke about the need to educate all stakeholders about the complex relationships between bullying, mental well-being and academic achievement.

To support the mental health of students in schools, participants suggested a robust support system of guidance counsellors, social workers, therapists, counsellors, psychologists, Educational Assistants and teachers who are trained in mental health supports and can help students and act as caring adults.

In the community, participants worried about cutbacks to wraparound services such as children's mental health programs and hospitals. They advocated for well-funded family supports and counselling services that work with schools to support children and youth. Parents, guardians and caregivers felt they needed better communication about existing resources; they did not want to have to ask repeatedly for support for their children. Participants also argued that ensuring students had their basic needs met, such as having enough food, adequate housing and proper clothing, would help support good mental health.

Parents, guardians and caregivers of students with special education needs were frustrated at the lack of therapeutic supports available for their children and the variation in supports available at different schools. Participants said a more streamlined process and partnerships with special education groups would help them navigate the "red tape" required to access supports. Participants also reminded the review panel members that children with special education needs often have complex needs and co-morbidities. As such, the siloed nature of the education, health and mental health systems does not always give children with special education needs access to the help they require. In addition, these systems should not take a "one size fits all" approach when assisting children.

Participants were also specifically concerned about the increasing risk of suicide for young white boys and suggested ongoing conversations to de-stigmatize mental health, depression and suicide.

Participants from racialized and marginalized communities asked for specialized resources to support the needs of students with intersectional identities. Participants asked for intercultural counselling programs; Indigenous participants specifically asked for programs and specialists to address intergenerational trauma. Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ students asked for safe, accessible, student-led, queer spaces for youth.

Staff learning and development

Another common theme in almost all sessions was the need for extensive training and development for staff, specifically teachers.

Participants wanted to ensure all teachers received training in the stages of child development and social-emotional learning, including how trauma affects behaviour and development, beginning in pre-service education programs. The purpose of this training, according to participants, was to help teachers understand how children at different stages of development require different interventions for bullying. Interventions that provide learning opportunities or formative consequences that promote the development of positive social skills, for example, are not appropriate for children at all stages of development.

To prevent bullying, participants wanted to see teachers trained to create positive and safe environments. To intervene in bullying situations, participants suggested training on how to differentiate bullying from conflict; tactics for managing "meltdowns," such as emotional coaching and behavioural management strategies; and mental health first aid. To help schools respond appropriately following a bullying incident, participants repeatedly suggested training in restorative justice, conflict resolution and circle work.

It is important to note that some participants from racialized communities were cautious about the use of restorative justice; this approach can cause harm if it is used from a position of power that does not acknowledge systemic oppression and power relationships.

Participants from marginalized and racialized communities recommended mandatory, meaningful and ongoing staff training in Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ issues, Indigenous issues, cultural competency, anti-oppression, anti-racism, the lived experiences of racialized communities, sex education (specifically healthy sex, pleasure and sexual hygiene), and how to identify the power dynamics in a bullying situation. Participants hoped this training would equip teachers to have tough conversations about equity, identify and stop microaggression and create an inclusive environment. Indigenous participants specifically wanted teacher training in the legacy of residential schools and intergenerational trauma, including how this trauma and distrust of the Canadian school system can be re-triggered or reflected in school bullying.

Participants attending the special education-related sessions felt that all teachers — not just special education teachers — needed core competencies to work with children and youth with special education needs. These participants felt that a basic level of training should be offered to all teachers in HWDSB.

Curriculum

In addition to training for teachers, participants in almost every session proposed changes to the curriculum. Curriculum is set at the provincial level. The recommendations in this report will be shared with the provincial government in the hopes of effecting change provincially as well as locally.

The most commonly suggested change to the curriculum was the addition of social-emotional learning, including a rebalancing of the curriculum to focus more on empathy, caring, emotional intelligence and play than on academic achievement, especially at younger ages. Educational specialists argued that creating a sense of belonging and attending to children's emotional health were critical factors for academic success. They said that focusing on academics instead of play at younger ages leads to poorer student outcomes. Participants repeatedly mentioned the Roots of Empathy program[8] as a way to teach children how to use language to communicate both boundaries and caring.

> *"Play is children's work."*
> *— Early Childhood Educator*

Although participants saw teaching social-emotional learning as a fundamental step toward preventing bullying, they also suggested other additions to the curriculum that more directly addressed bullying. To prevent bullying, participants suggested teaching students about what bullying is and its impact on other children. To help students intervene in a bullying situation, participants

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8   Roots of Empathy (rootsofempathy.org) is an international, evidence-based classroom program that has shown significant effect in reducing levels of aggression among schoolchildren by raising social/emotional competence and increasing empathy.

wanted schools to teach safe intervention strategies, have more frequent conversations about bullying, and host bullying awareness workshops to equip students with the language and tools to address aggressive behaviour. To help students respond to bullying incidents, participants wanted schools to teach students about strategies such as restorative justice, conflict resolution, de-escalation and mindfulness.

To address racism and oppression in the curriculum, participants from racialized and marginalized communities suggested reviewing the entire curriculum using an anti-oppressive and anti-racist framework. Participants asked for meaningful instruction about Indigenous history, different faiths, diversity, Black history, Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ history and the Holocaust.

Racialized and Jewish participants argued for removing racist materials, such as To Kill a Mockingbird and The Merchant of Venice, from the curriculum and replacing them with materials from diverse authors. Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ participants asked for student instruction on Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ issues, such as the use of pronouns, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) and sexual health. Participants in the special education sessions wanted students to receive training in how to behave with children with disabilities. Members of the Indigenous community asked for more Indigenous practices to be embedded in the curriculum, such as sharing circles and the use of talking pieces and feathers. They also requested Indigenous cultural and values training and programming for students.

Participants also had general comments about the curriculum that were not necessarily related to bullying but are important to capture here. In particular, participants asked for more opportunities for hands-on and experiential learning through arts programs and extra-curricular activities.

Participants also reminded the review panel that many of the curriculum changes they suggested would only be successful if teachers had the training, necessary classroom time and curriculum space, and the class size and supports to devote attention to individual students.

Increased and improved resources

In each session, participants acknowledged that creating a positive culture, addressing bullying and implementing the recommendations from this report would require time, funding, training, and additional educators and mental health staff, both in the school board and the community.

Participants linked larger class sizes to bullying. They also saw the increased administrative workload required to address bullying properly — documenting incidents, writing reports, consistently and regularly reporting data, and communicating with parents, guardians and caregivers, for example — as putting a strain on limited resources. To address this, participants advocated for increased resources for teachers, such as more EAs in the classroom and smaller class sizes.

> *"We need more staff. We need more support."*
> *— Union representative*

Participants repeatedly mentioned resource discrepancies between schools, pointing out that schools in nicer neighbourhoods had better reputations and more access to community supports. Participants asked government to stop spreading limited resources across too many schools, ensure resources were equitably distributed and expand arts and extra-curricular activities.

Theme 4: Board structures and processes

Supervision of students

Students said that they were most likely to experience bullying, violence, name calling and feelings of fear in unsupervised periods and areas of low supervision such as buses, hallways and changerooms.[9] They also shared that even in supervised areas teachers did not always pay attention to what was happening between students. Because of this, many participants called for more active supervision by teachers as well as increased supervision of students by parents, guardians, caregivers, onsite security, police officers and volunteers. Participants also advocated for smaller class sizes and having teachers on duty during lunch and breaks to prevent bullying.

Participants also identified several barriers to increasing student supervision. Teachers stated that they are increasingly "tied to their desks" to complete administrative work and that larger class sizes make supervising students more difficult. As well, some collective agreements have rules governing teacher supervision that may not make it easy to oversee the most dangerous times for students, such as transition periods.

Communications

Another common theme in all sessions was the desire for early, clear, frequent and consistent communication between parents, guardians, caregivers, community resources, teachers, trustees and other staff. Participants argued that this open and frequent communication is critical to address the fact that many parents, guardians, caregivers and students do not feel "heard" by schools or HWDSB.

Participants felt that timely, honest and meaningful responses to reports of bullying would encourage reporting. After a bullying incident, parents, guardians and caregivers want:

- To be notified immediately
- A clear understanding of the investigation process
- A say in any resolution processes
- Clear follow up
- To be provided with documentation at various steps in the process

Privacy was one aspect of communication that many parents, guardians, caregivers, staff and administrators found frustrating. There was widespread confusion about privacy requirements and what information could be shared with whom after a bullying incident. Participants wanted a clear understanding of privacy rules and wanted those rules uniformly enforced.

Policies and procedures

Participants had a lot to say about bullying policies and procedures in HWDSB. Participants felt policy application varied widely throughout the board and repeatedly asked for consistent interpretation of policies and enforcement. However, some participants pointed out that all policies would require some interpretation and that this could be a source of stress for school administrators.

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9   Students' stories of bullying in areas of low or no supervision were validated by the HWDSB Safe School Survey findings; students, parents and staff all reported that bullying primarily took place during breaks and outside recess, followed by hallways, washrooms and classrooms.

"There is a sense of fear in interpreting policies correctly, which heightens stress in our job. There is a sense of urgency to deal with a bullying episode and it doesn't help when the media jumps in on an active issue or my name is critiqued in a parent's Facebook post."
— Principal

In addition to inconsistent interpretation and enforcement, participants identified issues with existing policies. For example, participants felt policies do not adequately protect students who stand up to people who bully. They said policies often rely on outdated and ineffective "zero-tolerance" strategies. Black students, in particular, felt that dress code policies unfairly police their hair and clothing.

Participants had extensive feedback on the contents of bullying policies. Specifically, participants wanted clear and consistent:

- Definitions of bullying.
- Criteria for differentiating bullying from rudeness, conflict, abuse and violence.
- Guidelines for when the policy applies, for example during after school programs and field trips.
- Investigation processes, with a checklist of required information.
- Student safety plans.
- Injury and incident reporting processes.
- Role descriptions for all participants.
- Areas to capture the voices and stories of students, parents, guardians and caregivers.
- Criteria for follow-up actions, for example restorative justice and referral to community supports.
- Policies to address incidents of racism and discrimination.
- Follow-up procedures.

Independent reporting

Because of the perceived "culture of fear" in HWDSB, participants repeatedly identified that reporting bullying was an issue. To address this, many participants suggested mechanisms for independent, usually anonymous, reporting. These included:

- A weapon reporting line.
- An anonymous bullying reporting system (possibly online or through an app).
- A Ministry of Education website for reporting staff who bully, including teachers, principals and administrators.
- A confidential student committee.
- A neutral ombudsperson.
- More extensive use of the We Help program.[10]

Participants from marginalized communities argued for processes dedicated to reporting incidents of anti-Semitism, homophobia, cultural stereotyping and racism, though no further details were recorded.

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10 We Help is an HWDSB program designed to build a culture of help. See www.hwdsb.on.ca/blog/hwdsb-launches-we-help-campaign-to-build-culture-of-help/ for more details.

Cyberbullying

Many participants were concerned about the prevalence and severity of cyberbullying. Cyberbullying was often discussed with pessimism, since participants were not sure what strategies would successfully address it. Despite this, participants still offered strategies to combat cyberbullying. These included:

- Restricting access to social media sites on school property.
- Social media education for parents, guardians, caregivers and students, for example a credit course on social media etiquette.
- Outlining clear consequences for students caught cyberbullying.
- Clarifying that codes of conduct and rules about bullying apply to online environments.
- Talking about cyberbullying earlier than Grade 4, which is when it is first introduced in the current curriculum.
- Using the Ontario sex education curriculum to teach children about cyber safety.
- Referring to the book Reclaiming Conversation by Sherry Turkle for strategies to deal with cyberbullying.

After a bullying incident

Participants described a tension between those who favoured strict discipline (defined as a consequence or punishment) of the perpetrators of bullying and those who wanted a more restorative justice or therapeutic model. Sometimes the parents, guardians and caregivers of students who had been bullied or the students themselves wanted discipline while the school preferred a restorative justice approach. A belief in how power should be rebalanced was the key differentiator between these two camps. Bullied children feel powerless and many have been taught that punishment will balance power; in reality, the role of restorative justice is to rebalance the power.

Participants who favoured stricter consequences for people who bully talked about keeping them in at recess; barring them from class trips; not transferring them to other schools; expelling them for repeated bullying behaviour; and laying criminal charges. However, even those participants with a desire for stricter discipline wanted a thoughtful process for suspensions and expulsions to ensure fairness and transparency.

Participants who advocated for a restorative justice or therapeutic framework suggested ending suspensions; using anti-colonial restorative justice practices; engaging students who bully in a positive way through education; using community service; focusing on positive behaviour; and using in-school suspension programs.

"Deep change comes with natural consequences, yes, but even more so with an element of remorse, empathy and awareness and ownership of how actions can harm others. From this stance, restitution or restoration of relationships has a better chance to happen … and when that happens, the incidence of meanness, rudeness and bullying is likely to go down."
— Teacher

In several sessions, participants expressed concern for the well-being of victims of bullying, especially in the immediate aftermath of an incident. Participants felt the victim's experience should be made a priority; victims should be listened to, believed, given a proper, unbiased investigation, offered support

services and not stigmatized or blamed. After an incident, a victim should neither be isolated nor left alone with the student who bullied.

Accountability, evaluation and transparency

In many of the public consultation sessions, participants talked about the need to hold schools accountable for how they deal with bullying. The hope was that holding schools accountable would reduce inconsistencies between schools and improve outcomes. To evaluate how schools are doing and hold them accountable, participants suggested regular School Climate surveys; teacher, principal and staff report cards or feedback questionnaires; and ongoing student evaluation of programs. Participants suggested using these measurement tools to create a bullying-specific rating. Participants wanted the results of any tools the board implements to be reported publicly, with action plans to follow up on the results.

Tracking, data, and statistics

Comments from participants regarding the tracking of bullying data and statistics conveyed their distrust of HWDSB and its schools. Some participants felt that the board and individual superintendents and principals were withholding information and encouraging staff not to report all incidents of bullying to keep their statistics low. To encourage trust, participants asked for clear guidelines for data tracking and statistics reporting. Additionally, some participants asked for an independent body to oversee data collection and reporting.

In addition to longitudinal data and data on how situations were resolved, participants from marginalized communities asked HWDSB to track equity factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation and disability in bullying incidents and look for trends in these data.

Some participants questioned the methods used for existing data collection. Some participants identified data quality issues due to inconsistent data input methods and varying interpretations of both the definition of bullying and more abstract concepts such as "caring adult." From a content perspective, participants argued that multiple-choice surveys produce results biased toward more negative outcomes and do not provide schools with enough information for appropriate follow-up. Instead, participants advocated for mixed-methods research such as focus groups, snowball conversations and interviews; they felt this research would provide a more nuanced understanding bullying.

> *"It would be far more helpful to have focused interviews with students to find out exactly where they feel safe or not safe. It would also help us more precisely determine appropriate actions and interventions."*
> *— Teacher*

However, participants were also worried about the administrative burden already on teachers. Participants were concerned that increasing data and tracking requirements would lead to fatigue and burnout for teachers, with teachers eventually not even bothering to fill out the reports.

Theme 5: Partnerships

Partnerships with parents, guardians and caregivers

Participants felt parents, guardians and caregivers should be more involved in responding to incidents of bullying; offered education; valued as partners; and required to participate in disciplinary meetings, especially those involving suspension or expulsion. Parents, guardians and caregivers felt they should be listened to, offered community and family collaboration, supported to ensure their students feel safe, and have access to a parent liaison who would support students and families that were dealing with bullying.

> *"I would want to form a partnership with the school as a parent. Sadly, some parents have been dealing with a bullied child over a long period and now there is lack of trust. It comes down to us versus them. It's very sad."*
> — *Vice-Principal*

Participants also expressed empathy for parents, guardians and caregivers who had difficulty accepting their child's bullying behaviour. In particular, participants mentioned the fear parents, guardians and caregivers have of their children being labelled racist. Trustees advocated for "calling in" (as opposed to "calling out") parents, guardians and caregivers whose children bully to remove the fear families have of being considered bad if their children bully. They also acknowledged that parents, guardians and caregivers need to model good behaviour and suggested teaching them strategies for "advocating" in a way that does not become bullying.

Partnerships with the community

To prevent and respond to bullying, participants encouraged collaboration between schools and community organizations. Participants clearly valued the diverse skill set of community partners and advocated for more communication, cooperation and joint training. While many participants said that HWDSB should be working more closely with community partners, they also identified several barriers to forming partnerships, including groups having past negative experiences with the school board; differing priorities between the school board and communities; lack of coordination between community organizations; lack of clarity from the school board on what role partners should fill; and "red tape."

Participants suggested an extensive list of community partners. These included youth-serving organizations, community advocacy groups, volunteers, grassroots community organizers, key community leaders, and health and social service providers. Participants also suggested that HWDSB continue its existing successful partnerships with bullying prevention organizations.

Partnerships with experts and communities of practice

Many participants suggested connecting with existing experts, including researchers, HWDSB staff, community partners and professional consultants in Hamilton and beyond to ensure HWDSB's response is informed by those with content expertise.

To remove pressure from administrators, principals and teachers when dealing with bullying, participants suggested creating a "community of practice," described as a dedicated role or an

independent body to investigate bullying incidents. In addition to reducing administrative burden, participants felt that an independent body could address the lack of trust some students have for school administrators.

About the consultation process

Although the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel was meant to gather feedback on how to address bullying in HWDSB, many participants shared feedback about the review process itself. While many participants were pleased to be involved in the process, others discussed barriers to participation for low-income people and people who worked shifts, and inadequate promotion of the sessions. Some participants were upset that it took the death of a student to finally begin discussing bullying in Hamilton.

> *"Why are there not more conversations about this for students, staff and community on a regular basis? Instead of responding only when there is death or crisis?"*
> *— Community member*

Participants were forward-looking and advised the board to listen to and believe participants. They advocated for proactive, courageous, meaningful and tangible solutions to bullying. Many participants, however, were skeptical that anything would change as a result of the review process. Participants talked about previous consultations that were fruitless and questioned the board's willingness to allocate the resources needed to make change.

> *"[The] school board doesn't seem to want to do anything to address the real problems."*
> *— Community member*

> *"Students are powerless. Teachers are powerless. Principals are board puppets. Superintendents are overpaid men in suits that need to be held accountable to justify their salaries."*
> *— Community member*

4.2 Findings from the school board consultation

To hear the perspective of HWDSB, the review panel reached out to several school board-affiliated groups, including trustees, the HWDSB senior executive team, principals and vice-principals and their representatives (members of the Hamilton-Wentworth Principals Council and PASS Executive Team), the student senate, union leaders, and school board advisory committees. Most of these sessions took place in the summer and fall, well after the start of the public health measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

This section reflects the feedback from these groups and is clustered into four major themes:

> **Theme 1:** Experiences and perspectives of student leaders
> **Theme 2:** Accountability and consistency
> **Theme 3:** Expectations and competing priorities
> **Theme 4:** Community and culture

Theme 1: Experiences and perspectives of student leaders

Members of the student senate reiterated the feeling of not always being heard that was shared by students in the public consultations. Student senate members told the review panel that one of the most important things teachers could do to reduce bullying was to believe students and take their reports of bullying seriously.

> *"[They] need to take it seriously. [I] had a situation with a friend in my class who told the teacher and asked what to do as she feels uncomfortable. Teacher said that she probably has a crush on you, they didn't take it seriously and disregarded what was happening. [It] really affected [my] friend as she felt she couldn't talk about it because [the teacher] wouldn't take it seriously."*
> — Student

The review panel asked members of the student senate what students can do to prevent or reduce bullying. Senate members suggested ways students can support their peers who have been bullied. They also mentioned that older students can act as role models for younger students and all students can be kind and considerate to each other.

> *"If a student notices something happening, don't just stand there, go in and take the person being bullied away and stay with them until they are safe. Get to a teacher or tell the instigator off. Has happened to me and no one did anything, and I have done that as well out of fear. Stop being a watcher. Do something and get involved, even if it is to take attention off [the] person being bullied so they can get away."*
> — Student

> *"The students should just be kind and considerate of others because no one knows what the other person beside you is going through or if you actually see things happening to others then be kind and stand up for the people."*
> — Student

The review panel also asked student senate members what three words best described a safe school for them. The results are presented in Figures 4 and 5.

Figure 4. Words used by elementary student senate members to describe a safe and comfortable school

Figure 5. Words used by secondary student senate members to describe a safe and comfortable school

Theme 2: Accountability and consistency

School board leaders, staff and their representatives all acknowledged the need for increased accountability. However, participants at all levels of the school board were concerned about their ability to balance the competing demands of increased accountability and increased administrative burden, for example filling out reports and conducting investigations, without additional time or resources.

> *"For many teachers it's hard to address incidents in the moment because they have to get back to the classroom to meet the minimum standards ... The result is that these bullying issues and incidents often fall onto the shoulders of principals — because teachers have to get back to the classroom. This often results in people not feeling heard or cared-for in the moment."*
> — *Principal*

Theme 3: Expectations and competing priorities

A similar anxiety was expressed when discussing the need for cultural changes to help prevent bullying and better support students. Trustees, principals, vice-principals and teachers were concerned the community would expect drastic change quickly, despite the fact that it takes time and resources to effect cultural change. Participants all talked about how the lack of government funding might inhibit the ability to make that change.

> *"I feel the pressure that the leaders feel from us, the Ministry, from the community is pretty intense."*
> — *Trustee*

> *"But resources are not just handed out. There is some heavy lifting. School-wide culture support takes about two years ... We need community training, working together and planning. This is a strengths-based model. We can do simpler or easier things, but to do better we have to invest time, and school leaders and their teams have to understand that the investment of time is necessary to create a new and caring culture so everyone does better."*
> — *Trustee*

> *"We need support from the Ministry."*
> — *Trustee*

Teachers were especially concerned about how they would embed cultural change in a curriculum that has been so heavily weighted toward academics by the Ministry. After hearing all the curriculum changes suggested in public consultations and by other school board groups, teachers shared that they were concerned about their ability to teach new skills, such as social-emotional learning, while still achieving academic milestones, such as covering the Ontario curriculum and preparing for the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) tests.

> *"The curriculum is so much to cover … how do I find the time?"*
> — *Teacher*

> *"My job is to protect the student."*
> — *Teacher*

Theme 4: Community and culture

Although the focus of this report is on bullying in HWDSB, participants from school board-affiliated groups also discussed the relationship between schools and the communities in which they are situated. They noted that schools are a microcosm of the community. For example, school board staff and leadership shared how the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to student feelings of isolation, exclusion and vulnerability, as well as mental health concerns. They advocated for solutions to bullying that involve not just schools, but also communities and parents, guardians and caregivers.

> *"I would like to look at the education piece, to work in partnership with the parents and the students themselves around some of the words we use, whether it's conflict, bullying or harassment. I think that we need to do a better job of building the capacity beyond just the school."*
> — *Vice-Principal*

> *"It takes a village to raise a child … we should all be part of this village. Sometimes things are handled differently at a different school, so we need a more unified response across the board."*
> — *Advisory committee member*

Although this report was triggered by an incident involving HWDSB students, participants shared that HWDSB staff are also impacted by a negative school culture and are the target of bullying and violent behaviour. They argued that staff are not listened to, consulted with or believed about their experiences at the hands of students and, in some cases, the students' families. According to some HWDSB staff, when they share their experiences with the board, they do not always feel supported.

> *"…My members are the victims of bullying by students and other staff ... The mental health cost to being witness to these ongoing acts is very concerning, causing a great deal of fatigue. The teachers are feeling ignored and undermined and feel that they have a lot of responsibility with little-to-no tools. A lot of the teachers are off on WSIB or LTD because of the effects of violence and bullying."*
> — *Union representative*

"We are in a position of constantly choosing between the safety and rights of the bully, the target, and the safety of the staff and students. We are told that the bully has a right to an education. And absolutely we agree. We agree that inclusion is important — but equally important is the demand for a workplace that is safe."
    — Union representative

HWDSB staff, union representatives and trustees also felt that reporting their experiences could lead to reprisal. They agreed that this must change and that transparency and accountability are required in order to rebuild trust.

"Parents are calling out of frustration. By the time we hear the story, they're really frustrated."
    — Trustee

"I have a grandson who recently saw another child bullying and hitting another child and my grandson spoke up, telling him to stop it. When his parents reported, they learned the only thing being done was the child who was bullying was being sent home. He had done something like this already four other times in that school year so far. But, in fact, when they went to the school, the child was still in the school — he hadn't gone home. He had also threatened that he would follow my grandson home and threatened him because he heard he had told on him and said he knew where he lived. But as far as we could tell they did nothing about that."
    — Advisory committee member

4.3 Conclusions from the community consultation

Since Devan's tragic death, members of the community have come forward and expressed deep concern about bullying in HWDSB and our community. The response to the review panel's outreach to various communities and groups in Hamilton, including students, parents, guardians and caregivers, has been truly overwhelming. This affirmed for the review panel that the community cares deeply about our children and our schools.

The review panel heard from more than 1,000 community consultation participants during the 18 sessions with community members and nine sessions with school board-affiliated groups. These are the nine high-level findings from the qualitative consultation data.

1. Bullying is a problem in the Hamilton community. Students, teachers, parents, guardians and caregivers are experiencing bullying and it is affecting their mental health and well-being.

2. Certain groups experience bullying at higher rates. The survey findings that will be shared in the next chapter indicate that HWDSB students who identify as gender diverse and Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ reported the highest rates of bullying victimization. This was corroborated by the community consultation findings. A common theme emerging from consultations was that many students are experiencing bullying because of their race, ethnicity, Newcomer status, disability, religion and Indigenous identity. This indicates the need for an intersectional approach to bullying prevention and intervention.

3. In some instances, there is a culture of fear in HWDSB that prevents people from reporting or taking action on bullying incidents.

4. People at all levels of the board, from trustees to students, express the desire to create a culture of caring where people are supported and feel like they belong and can learn.

5. Participants value partnerships with parents, guardians, caregivers, experts, communities and community groups. They see these partnerships as crucial to helping children and youth feel like they belong and to addressing bullying.

6. Participants want clear and transparent communication and want to feel that their voices are heard and valued.

7. Participants want robust and clear policies and procedures at HWDSB that are consistently followed, easy to access and monitored for effectiveness.

8. Both schools and the community need to be well resourced, and those resources need to be culturally appropriate, of high quality and distributed equitably to support the mental health and well-being of children, youth, parents, guardians, caregivers, teachers and community members.

9. Participants want accountability and transparency through the tracking and public reporting of data and statistics.

Given these findings, it is important that the recommendations in this report address a broad range of issues. Recommendations will have to address bullying at the micro level, for example, preventing bullying between individuals; at the board level, for example, addressing the culture of fear and building partnerships; and at the systems level, for example, reviewing the Education Act and the provincial curriculum from an equity lens and including the most up-to-date research on bullying prevention strategies. As well, recommendations will need to be tangible, such as new policies and changes in supervision, and conceptual, such as changing organizational culture and creating a sense of belonging.

5. HWDSB Safe School Survey

In addition to the community consultation, the review panel conducted online surveys with students, parents, guardians, caregivers and HWDSB staff to ensure as many people as possible could have their voices heard.[11] Dr. Tracy Vaillancourt and her research team at the uOttawa Brain and Behaviour Lab worked with Dr. Debra J. Pepler to design and administer the survey. The data were analyzed by Dr. Tracy Vaillancourt and Dr. Ann Farrell.

5.1 Participants

The survey was distributed online to students in Grades 4 to 12, parents, guardians, caregivers and staff members. It was available from the end of October to the beginning of November 2020.

Students were randomized at the level of the school into two groups, called "conditions," to account for the COVID-19 pandemic. The "current condition" group was asked questions about their experiences from September to November 2020. The "pre-COVID-19 condition" group was asked questions about their experiences prior to the pandemic, from September 2019 to March 2020. A total of 2683 students completed the current condition survey and 3895 students completed the pre-COVID-19 survey. The student sample characteristics are presented in Figure 6.

**Figure 6. Student sample characteristics**
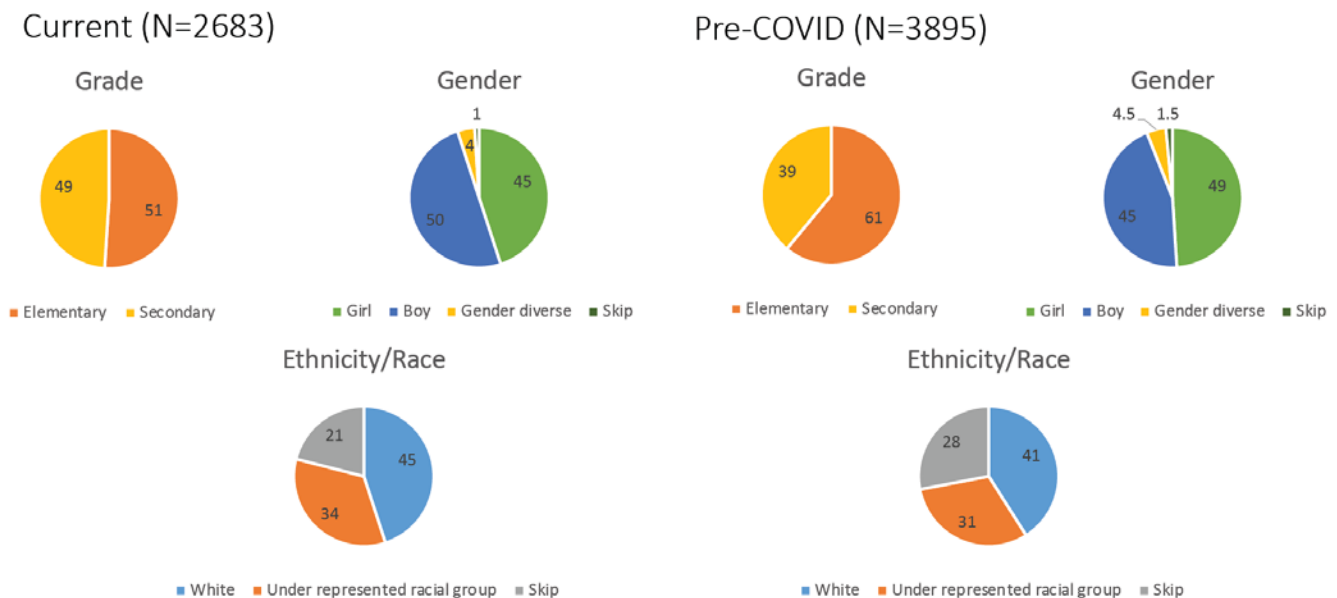
Parents, guardians and caregivers completed a survey that was similar to the version provided to staff and students; they were asked only about their experiences prior to COVID-19 (specifically from September 2019 to March 2020). A total of 2397 parents, guardians and caregivers participated.

If they had more than one child in an HWDSB school, respondents were asked to complete the survey with their oldest child in mind. Participants were most often caregivers of elementary school students (82%), with an about-equal representation of daughters (47%) and sons (50%). Three per cent of parents, guardians and caregivers noted that their child was gender-diverse. In terms of ethnicity/ race, 73% were white and 27% were from underrepresented racial groups. Most parent and guardian respondents were women (80%), followed by men (17%) and gender-diverse respondents (3%).

11 The original plan for the survey had to be modified and adapted because of the new context created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Staff completed a similar safe schools survey to students, parents, guardians and caregivers. Like parents, guardians and caregivers, staff were asked only about their experiences from September 2019 to March 2020 (pre-COVID-19). A total of 424 staff members completed the survey. Most were women (71%) with 22% men and 7% gender-diverse. Ninety-one per cent were white. The work backgrounds of staff respondents are presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Staff sample characteristics
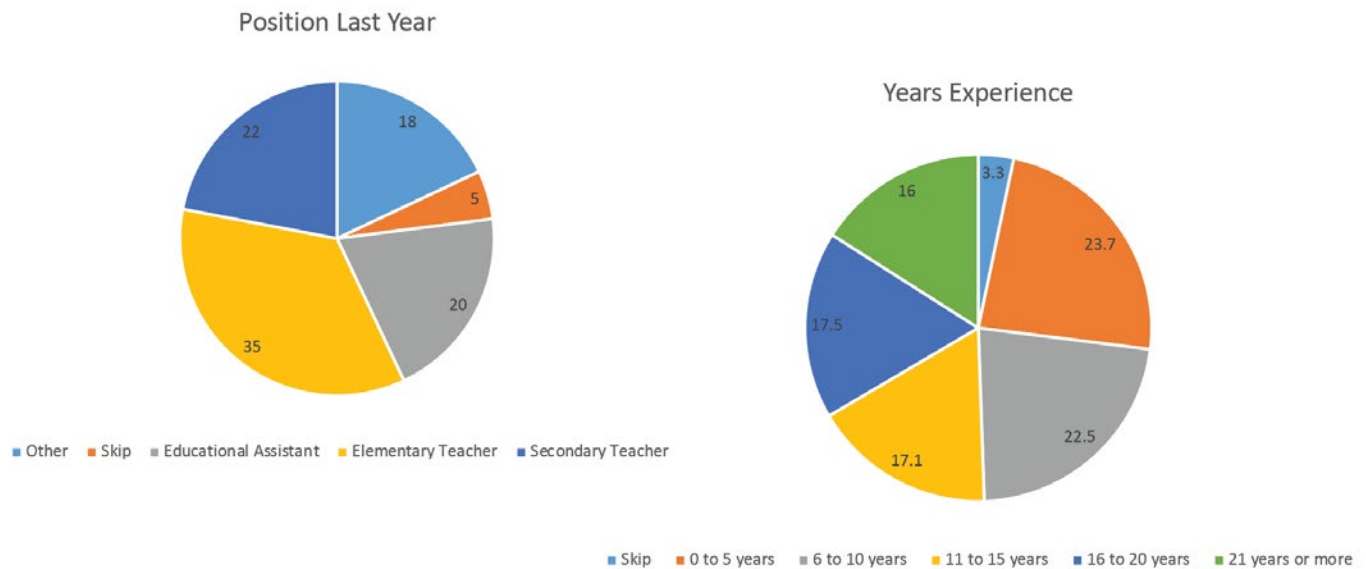
5.2 Plan and procedures for analysis

Across all surveys, exposure to bullying was calculated by creating a composite score that included a general question about bullying along with four questions that asked about experiences with different forms of bullying (verbal, physical, social and cyber) that included several examples of each of the types of targeted behaviour. A 5-point frequency scale was used to assess prevalence: 0 = not at all, 1 = only a few times this year, 2 = every month, 3 = every week, and 4 = many times a week. Participants were asked about victimization, perpetration and witnessing. Following procedures used in the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) surveys and recommendations by Vaillancourt et al. (2008), participants were asked to read a definition that differentiated bullying from fighting, aggression and teasing.

All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 27.0. Following procedures outlined in Vaillancourt et al. (2010), data from the general screening questions were combined into separate bullying experience groups for victims (been bullied), perpetrator (bullied others) and witnesses. These groups were described as follows: (a) those reporting never being bullied or never bullying others or never witnessing bullying (coded as "0," non-involved) and (b) those reporting some level of involvement with bullying, ranging from only a few times to every week (coded as "1," involved). Results from these composites are referred to as "bullied at any rate".

We also created another more conservative composite based on procedures outlined in Solberg and Olweus (2003) in which (a) those reporting never being bullied or bullying others or witnessing bullying or being bullied or bullying others or witnessing bullying a few times were coded as "0," non-involved; and (b) those reporting some level of involvement with bullying ranging from every month to every week were coded as "1," involved. Results from these composites are referred to as "bullied frequently."
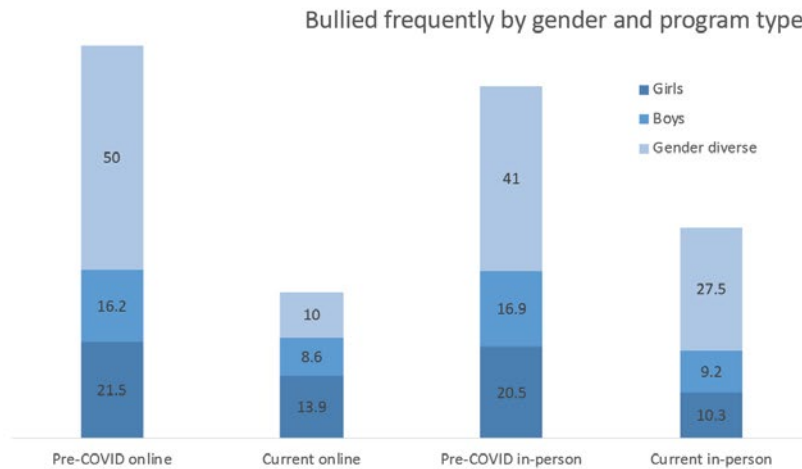
5.3 Results

Bullying victimization. The overall proportion for bullying victimization was consistently higher in the pre-COVID condition than in the current condition. The proportion of students who reported being bullied at any rate was 59.8% in the pre-COVID condition and 39.5% in the current condition. When examined with a higher frequency cut-off, 19.7% of students reported being bullied frequently in the pre-COVID condition compared to 10.7% in the current condition (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Overall victimization proportions (%)
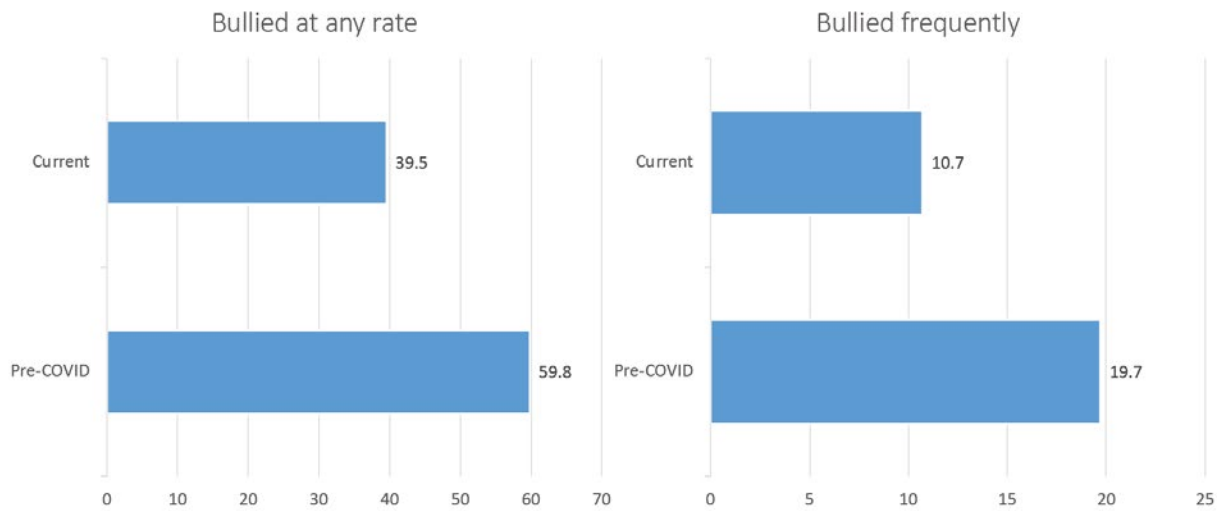
White students reported being bullied at a higher rate than underrepresented racial groups in the pre-COVID condition. Moreover, gender-diverse students reported being bullied at alarming rates: 72.7% in the pre-COVID condition and 59.7% in the current condition (the "bullied at any rate" composite), and 41.9% in the pre-COVID condition and 26.1% in the current condition (the "bullied frequently" composite). Students who identified as Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ reported far higher rates of abuse than heterosexual students, especially in the pre-COVID condition (frequently: 30.3% vs 13.8% heterosexual). Elementary school students who were bullied pre-COVID were more likely to be currently enrolled in a virtual learning program. This was also true of gender-diverse youth (see Figure 9). Sexual minority youth (gender and sexual orientation) reported the highest levels of bullying victimization.

Figure 9. Gender diverse students who were bullied pre-COVID went online to learn

Bullied frequently by gender and program type

Bullying victimization was correlated (all results are statistically significant at p<.01) with greater bullying perpetration, greater witnessing of bullying, higher moral disengagement, lower perception of school safety, lower perception of adults who care in the school, lower perception of mattering, and a poorer school climate.

The impact of bullying on targets was notable, especially for gender-diverse students. Students who were bullied reported difficulties in all areas of functioning, such as difficulties with friends and school. They felt particularly angry and sad and reported feeling like they could not stop the bullying and that it had a negative impact on their friendships. Bullied students also reported that when they told someone about being bullied, things only got better 27.0% (current condition) and 31.6% (pre-COVID condition) of the time. Many victims did not tell anyone about being bullied (36.0% current and 27.5% pre-COVID), especially boys. For some students, telling made things worse (7.4% current and 8.5% pre-COVID) or nothing changed (29.6% current and 32.4% pre-COVID). If they did tell an adult at their school that they were being bullied, the advice they were given differed by their gender. Girls were told to ignore bullying more often than boys. Girls also reported having their concerns listened to and being given suggestions to stop it more often than boys. Finally, bullied students used a variety of strategies, but most often they ignored it, walked away, told a friend or told a parent or guardian.

Bullying perpetration. The overall proportion for bullying perpetration was consistently higher in the pre-COVID condition than in the current condition. The proportion of students who reported bullying others at any rate was 24.7% in the pre-COVID condition and 13.0% in the current condition. When examined with a higher frequency cut-off, only 2.8% of students reported bullying others frequently in the pre-COVID condition compared to 1.8% in the current condition. When examined by race/ethnicity, underrepresented racial groups reported bullying others at higher rates in the current-any, current-frequent, and pre-COVID-frequent conditions. Girls reported bullying others less frequently than boys and gender-diverse students.
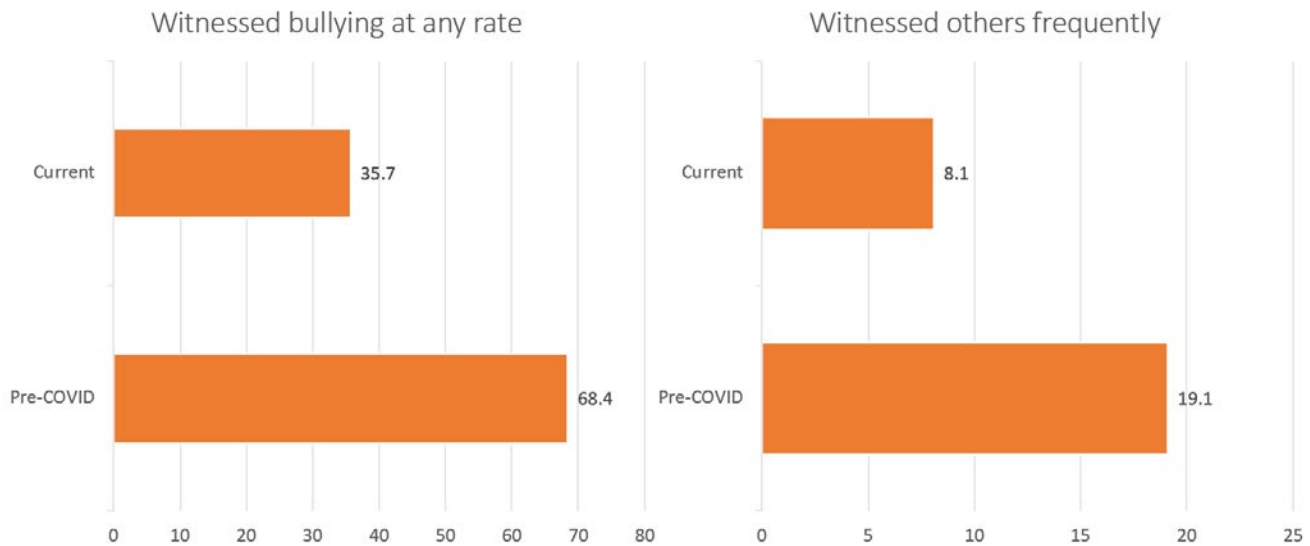
Bullying perpetration was correlated (all results are statistically significant at p<.01) with greater bullying victimization, greater witnessing of bullying, higher moral disengagement, lower moral engagement, lower perception of school safety, lower perception of adults who care in the school, lower perception of mattering, and a poorer school climate.

Witnessing bullying. The overall proportion for witnessing bullying was consistently higher in the pre-COVID condition than in the current condition. The proportion of students who reported

witnessing others being bullied at any rate was 68.4% in the pre-COVID condition and 35.7% in the current condition. When examined with a higher frequency cut-off, 19.1% of students reported witnessing others being bullied frequently in the pre-COVID condition compared to 8.1% in the current condition (see Figure 10).

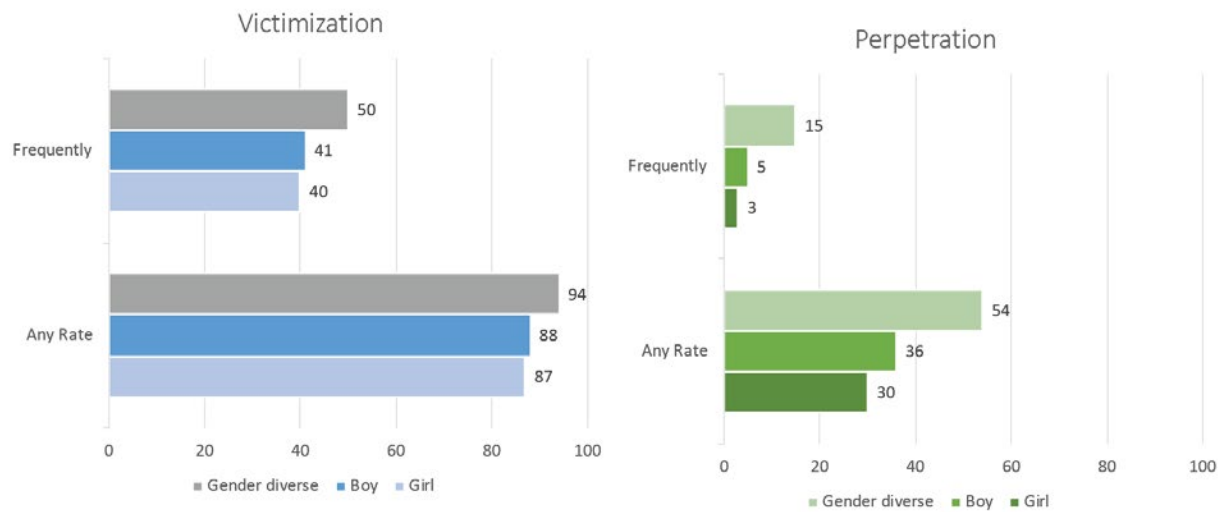**Figure 10. Overall witnessing proportions (%)**

Witnessing peers being bullied was correlated (all results are statistically significant at p<.01) with greater bullying victimization, greater bullying perpetration, higher moral disengagement, lower moral engagement, lower perception of school safety, lower perception of adults who care in the school, lower perception of mattering, and a poorer school climate.

School safety. Students were asked about how safe they felt at school (all the time, most of the time, some of the time, rarely, and never) and were asked to indicate where they felt least safe at school. Most students (87.4% current and 85.7% pre-COVID) reported feeling safe at school (most of the time plus all of the time); however, students who reported feeling less safe at school were more likely to be enrolled in a virtual learning program. Students identified several areas where they felt unsafe. The highest-rated areas were in areas of low supervision — washrooms, hallways, and during breaks and outside recess. This was consistent with the locations that students identified as being where bullying occurred most. Although low-supervised areas, such as hallways, were chosen most frequently, it is worth noting that students chose breaks and outside recess as places where bullying frequently occurred (28.4% current and 35.0% pre-COVID).

Results from parents, guardians and caregivers

Bullying victimization and perpetration. The overall proportions for parent, guardian and caregiver reports of bullying victimization were high, with 88.0% reporting their child had been bullied at any rate and 41.0% reporting frequent bullying victimization. The proportions of parents, guardians and caregivers who indicated that their child had bullied others was 33.0% at any rate and 4.0% for frequently. White respondents reported higher bullying victimization than respondents belonging to underrepresented racial groups. Respondents caring for gender-diverse children reported higher victimization and perpetration rates compared to respondents whose children identified as boys and girls (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. Parent/guardian-rated overall victimization and perpetration proportions (%) by child gender

Parents, guardians and caregivers reported a higher victimization rate if their child was currently enrolled in an online learning program. This is consistent with student reports.

Parent, guardian and caregiver reports of bullying victimization were correlated (all results are statistically significant at p<.01) with greater bullying perpetration, lower perception of school safety, lower perception of adults who care in the school, lower perception of mattering, and a poorer school climate. Parent, guardian and caregiver reports of bullying perpetration were correlated (all results are statistically significant at p<.01) with greater bullying victimization, lower perception of school safety, lower perception of mattering, and a poorer school climate.
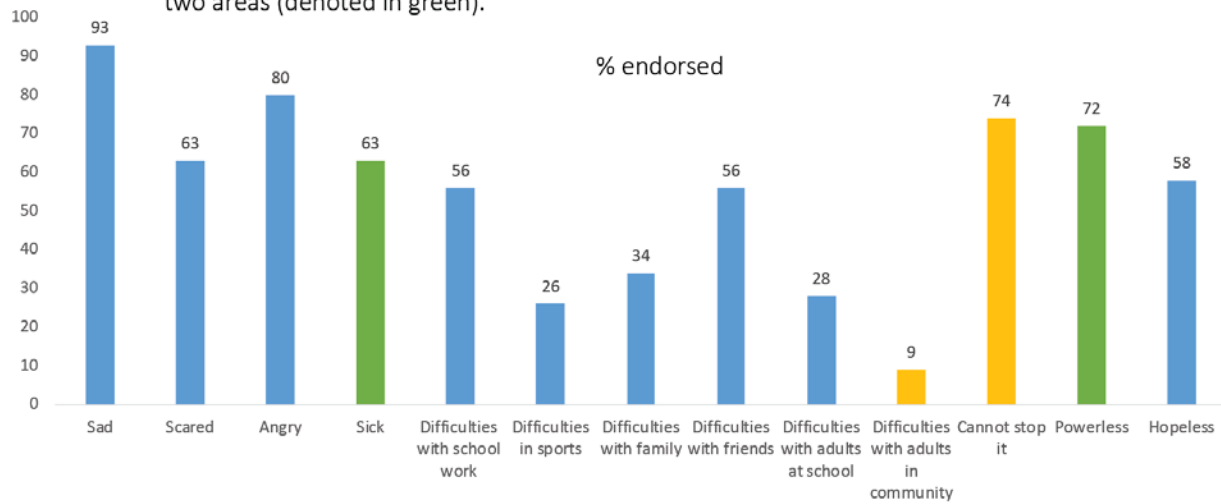
According to parents, guardians and caregivers, the bullying of their child primarily occurred during breaks/outside recess (70.0%) followed by in the classroom (37.0%) and the hallways (23.0%).

As noted in the student section, the impact of bullying on targets is notable when considering parent/ guardian reports. Bullied students were sad, angry, and scared. They felt like they could not stop it, they felt powerless, and hopeless. Compared to white parents/guardians/caregivers, parents/ guardians/caregivers who belong to an underrepresented racial group reported that their child had higher rates of not being able to stop the bullying and having difficulties with adults in the community. Conversely, white parents/guardians/caregivers reported their child experienced more sickness and powerlessness than parents/guardians/caregivers who belong to an underrepresented racial group (see Figure 12).

Figure 12. Impact of bullying on targets, racial group highlighted

Parents/guardians who belong to an underrepresented racial group report higher adverse child effects in relation to their child being bullied in two areas (denoted in yellow).

White parents/guardians report higher child adverse effects in relation to their child being bullied in two areas (denoted in green).

% endorsed

There were also impact differences based on gender. Specifically, parents, guardians and caregivers of gender-diverse students reported higher adverse child effects in relation to their child being bullied in several areas (denoted in yellow in Figure 13). Parents, guardians and caregivers whose child had been bullied said that the child most often told their parent/guardian (78.0%), followed by telling an adult at school (50.0%). Respondents also reported that their child walked away (36.0%), ignored it (29.0%), told a friend (28.0%), and stood up to their aggressor (24.0%).

Figure 13. Impact of bullying on targets, gender diverse students highlighted

Parents/guardians of gender nonconforming students report higher adverse child effects in relation to their child being bullied in several areas (denoted in yellow).

% endorsed
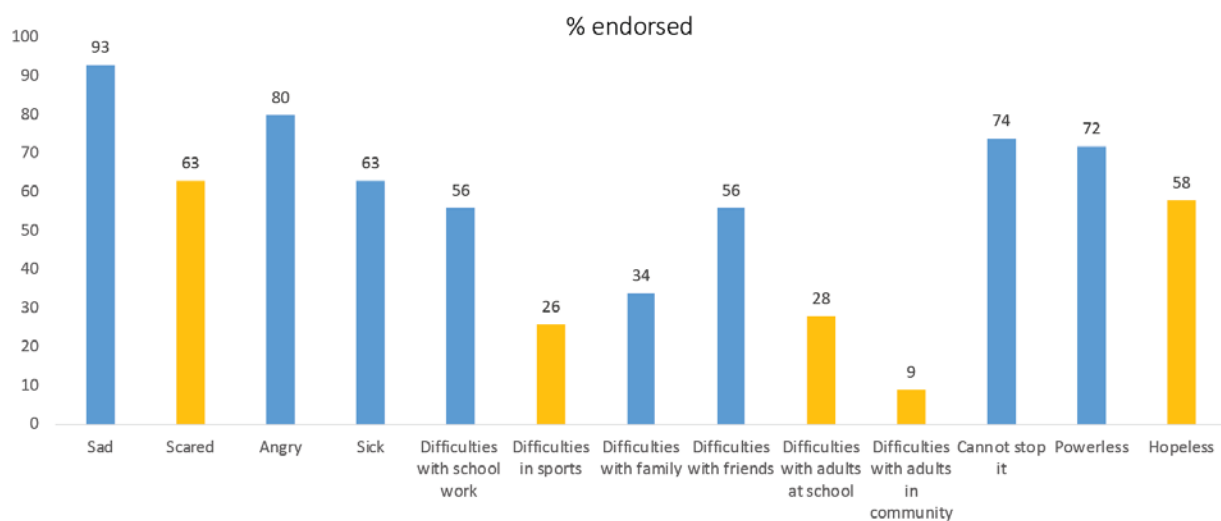
Parents, guardians and caregivers also reported that when their child had told someone about being bullied, things only got better 33.0% of the time. Many stated that nothing had changed for their child (53.0%), while 7.0% said things had become worse and 7.0% did not disclose the abuse to anyone. There were no differences based on the gender of the student. If students did tell an adult at their

school that they were being bullied, parents, guardians and caregivers reported that adults most often listened to their child's concerns (40.0%), suggested ways to stop the bullying (25.0%), and told their child to ignore it (22.0%). There were no differences based on the gender of the student.

School safety. Parents, guardians and caregivers were asked about how safe their child felt at school (all the time, most of the time, some of the time, rarely, and never) and were asked to indicate where their child felt least safe at school. Most respondents (82.2%) reported that their child felt safe at school (most of the time plus all of the time). Respondents reported that their child felt particularly unsafe on breaks and at recess (60.0%). Children also felt unsafe in the classroom (28.0%) and the hallways (27.0%).

Overall experiences. Parents, guardians and caregivers were asked about perceptions of how their child's school dealt with bullying. The majority perceived rules related to conduct and behaviour were consistently enforced at their child's school (89.2%), and that something was done about incidents of bullying if a student complained to an adult (86.4%). The majority of respondents were also satisfied with steps taken to prevent bullying at their child's school (70.6%) and the school board (61.7%). The majority of parents, guardians and caregivers rated the efforts of adults at their child's school to make the school a safe place as very good (26.8%) or good (43.4%), followed by poor (18.6%) and very poor (11.2%).

<div align="center">

Staff results

</div>

Bullying victimization. The overall proportions for bullying victimization were high, with 97% of staff reporting students being bullied at any rate and 71% reporting students being bullied frequently. Elementary school staff reported significantly higher levels of bullying victimization than secondary school staff.

We asked staff about racially-based victimization and victimization based on sexual orientation. Staff reported rates that were lower than the students' reports yet were still concerning (see Figure 14).

**Figure 14. Staff-rated student victimization proportions (%)**
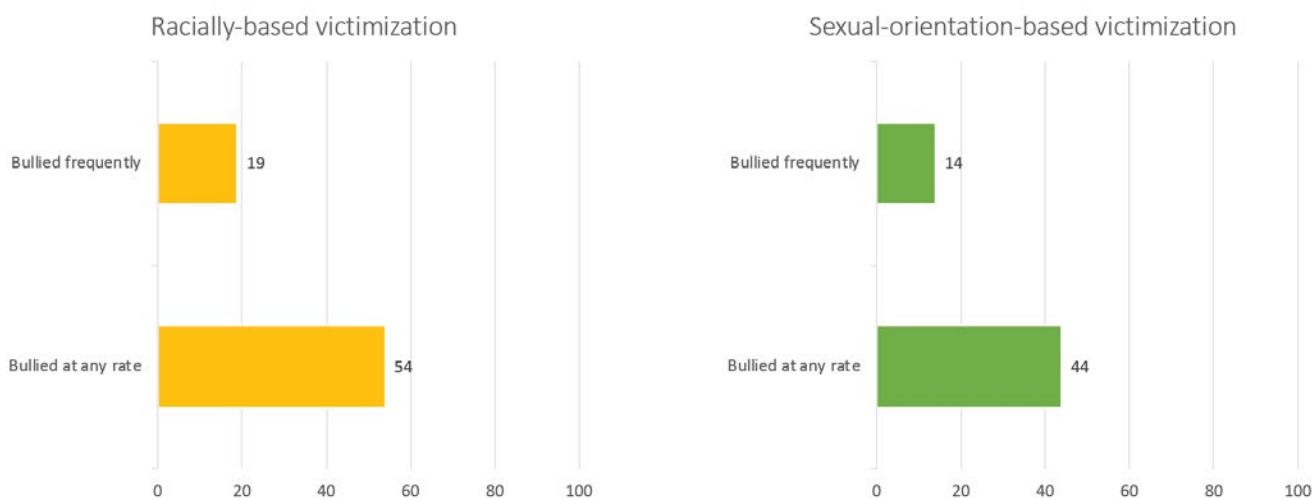
Staff reports of higher bullying victimization were correlated (all results are statistically significant at p<.01 unless noted otherwise) with a lower perception of school safety, lower perception of adults who care in the school (p<.05), lower perception of mattering (p<.05), and a poorer school climate.

Staff rated the impact of bullying victimization on students. All correlations are statistically significant at p<.01 unless noted otherwise. Higher bullying victimization was related to being sad, being scared, feeling sick, difficulty with school, difficulty in sports, difficulty with family, difficulty with friends, difficulty with adults at school, difficulty with adults in the community (p<.05), feeling like they couldn't stop it, feeling powerless, and feeling hopeless.

According to staff, students were bullied primarily at break-time and during outside recess (61.0%), followed by the hallways (43.0%), the washrooms (31.0%), and in the classroom (25.0%). This is consistent with student and parent, guardian and caregiver reports. Staff also reported that students were bullied on their cell phones at high rates (28.0%).

Staff identified a variety of strategies they thought bullied students used (see Figure 15).

Figure 15. Staff perception of what students did when bullied (% endorsed)
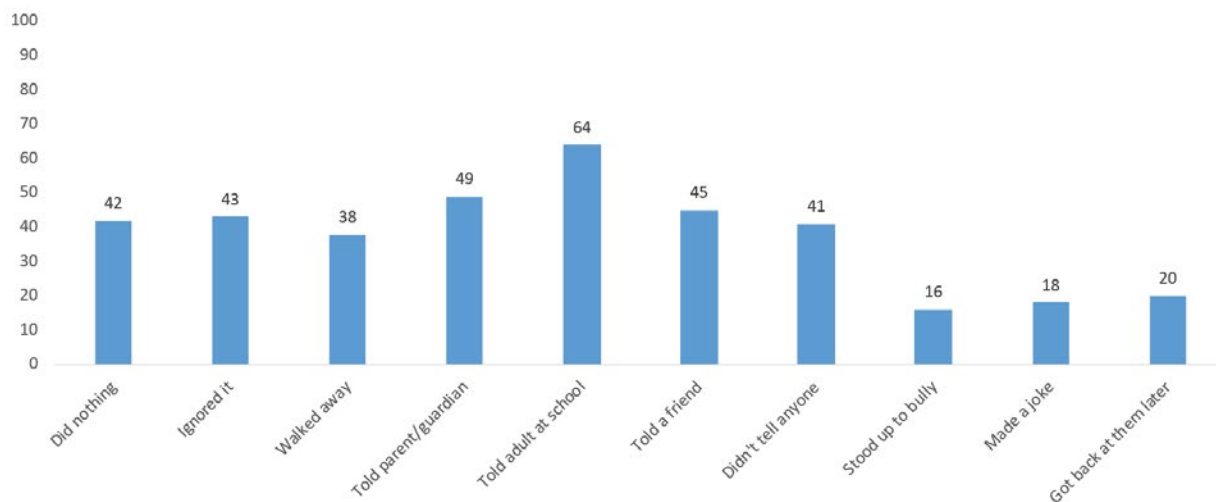
Staff were more positive than students and parents, guardians and caregivers about what happened to students if they told someone about being bullied. Specifically, they thought that things got better 41.0% of the time versus 31.6% for students (pre-COVID) and 33.0% for parents, guardians and caregivers. Many staff stated that nothing changed for students (47.0%), while 7.0% said things got worse and 5.0% did not believe students disclosed the abuse to anyone.

If students told an adult at school, staff members reported that the adult responded in a variety of ways. They listened to students' concerns (84.0%), suggested ways to stop the bullying (72.0%), disciplined the perpetrator (58.0%), and told students to ignore it (22.0%).

School safety. Staff were asked about how safe their students felt at school (all the time, most of the time, some of the time, rarely, and never) and were asked to indicate where the students felt least safe at school. Seventy-one per cent of staff reported that students felt safe at school (most of the time plus all of the time). It is worth noting, however, that only 3.4% stated that their students felt safe at school "all of the time." Staff reported that students felt particularly unsafe on breaks and at recess (63.0%), in the washroom (51.0%), in the hallway (45.0%), on their cell phones (36.0%), on their way home (33.0%), and on the bus (32.0%).

Overall experiences. Staff were asked about their experiences with bullying. Some reported that they had seen one staff member bullying another staff member at their school (44.9%) and had themselves been bullied by other staff (25.2%), students (30.8%), or parents of students (45.6%) at their school. Some staff also reported that they had seen staff bullying students (30.8%) or students bullying staff (60.3%) at their school.

Staff were also asked about perceptions of how their school dealt with bullying. The majority reported that they collaborated with other staff to coordinate effective responses to bullying (87.6%), perceived that rules related to conduct and behaviour were consistently enforced (87.9%), felt confident to respond effectively to bullying (89.1%), and felt that something was done about incidents of bullying if a student complained to an adult (83.6%). The majority of staff were also satisfied with steps taken to prevent bullying at their school (79.3%) and the school board (68.8%). The majority of staff felt positively about the efforts of adults at their school to make the school a safe place (very good 34.7%, good 49.0%), but others were not positive (poor 12.7%, very poor 3.5%). The majority of staff felt positively about school board efforts to make the school a safe place (very good 15.3%, good 38.8%); however, a substantial proportion were not positive (poor 25.1%, very poor 20.8%).

5.4 Summary of findings from surveys

- Students, parents, guardians, caregivers and staff reported high levels of bullying victimization. Students who identify as gender-diverse and Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ were particularly vulnerable.

- Students, parents, guardians, caregivers and staff reported that unsupervised areas were associated with feeling less safe and higher bullying rates. In particular, breaks and outside recess were hazardous.

- Involvement in bullying as a victim, perpetrator or witness tended to be associated with higher moral disengagement, lower perception of school safety, lower perception of adults who care in the school, lower perception of mattering, and a poorer school climate across all reporters.

- Bullied students felt angry and sad and reported feeling like they could not stop it. The quality of their relationships with others also suffered.

- Bullied students used a variety of strategies to deal with their abuse, with the most frequently reported being ignoring it, walking away, or telling a friend, parent, guardian or caregiver.

- Students, parents, guardians, caregivers and staff reported that when students told someone about bullying, things only got better about a third of the time. They also reported that often nothing changed. For a minority of students (7%), things got worse.

- The majority of parents, guardians, caregivers and staff were satisfied with the steps taken by schools and HWDSB to prevent bullying.

- Students who were bullied pre-COVID were overrepresented in e-learning programs, suggesting they avoided the social context of school.

6. Review panel recommendations

Scope of review panel recommendations

The HWDSB Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel was created with a focus on bullying prevention, intervention, reporting and responding. In this chapter, the review panel highlights priority areas of action and recommended action steps. These are specific to bullying prevention and intervention in HWDSB schools and based on the many experiences, perspectives and suggestions shared through the qualitative consultation process and quantitative surveys.

Additionally, the review panel members were asked to pay attention to systemic issues and root causes of bullying; critically analyze the consultation findings and school data; and rely on the expertise of external researchers to inform recommendations. As a result, some of the following wider-ranging recommendations address the broader context within which bullying persists, including organizational culture, system priorities and barriers.

While students were the primary focus of the review, recommendations also consider the impact of school-based bullying on parents, guardians, caregivers and HWDSB staff. For example, several review panel recommendations aim to develop a culture of caring in HWDSB. An environment of positive caring benefits everyone: students, educators, other HWDSB staff, parents, guardians, caregivers, and other members of the school community, including volunteers and community partners.

Review panel recommendations are specific in some areas, for example, feedback on HWDSB's current bullying prevention and intervention practices, but remain at a high level in others, such as school-level approaches. This is because specific solutions need to be identified and developed by those most closely connected to the problem of bullying — students, parents, guardians, caregivers, educators and other school staff, and community partners.

Guiding principles

The recommendations address a number of themes that emerged from the community consultation sessions, surveys and key stakeholder conversations, as well as the gaps, challenges and opportunities identified by the panel. These principles do not constitute recommendations themselves but, taken together, reflect an approach, an ethos and a foundation upon which the recommendations have been built.

1. **Healthy relationships, healthy development.** Nurturing, caring relationships are critical to child and youth well-being as well as a thriving education community; this includes healthy relationships between students, students and staff, and staff members.

2. **Equity and excellence.** Pursuit of high-quality experiences and outcomes for all requires identifying and removing discriminatory biases and systemic barriers at all levels.

3. **Values-focused culture.** It is important to develop and constantly monitor a widely shared institutional culture of care that places the well-being of all students and staff at its core.

4. **Engagement and collaboration.** The best solutions are co-created, with meaningful and representative input and involvement from key stakeholders, especially students, parents, guardians, caregivers, educators, other staff and community partners.

5. **Data-informed, evidence-based.** Insights and evidence drawn from data collection, research and acknowledged best practices are consistently used to inform decision making; efforts are made to improve outcomes frequently and iteratively.

6. **Systems-focus.** Bullying is understood and treated as a system-wide phenomenon that results in a pervasive negative climate; solutions must change the climate as well as institutional structures and processes, not just deal with individual incidents.

7. **Consistency, transparency and ongoing communication.** Success requires clear roles and processes, and consistent application of policies and practices. To build trust, communication must be frequent, accessible, transparent, honest and open.

8. **Sustained implementation, accountability and continuous quality improvement.** It is important to commit to long-term solutions; an ongoing implementation process with clearly established accountability mechanisms involving students, parents, guardians, caregivers and community partners; and a continuous quality improvement framework.

In developing its recommendations, the review panel also considered the Ontario Education Act's (1990) description of the education system, specifically that:

- School principals and educators are required to give assiduous attention to the health and comfort of students.
- A strong public education system is the foundation of a prosperous, caring and civil society.
- The purpose of education is to provide students with the opportunity to realize their potential and develop into highly skilled, knowledgeable, caring citizens who contribute to their society.
- All partners in the education sector have a role to play in enhancing student achievement and well-being, closing gaps in student achievement and maintaining confidence in the province's publicly funded education systems.

In addition, the comprehensive final report of the St. Michael's College School's Independent Respect and Culture Review Committee (2019) was a valuable resource to the review panel when developing specific action steps.

Finally, the review panel also considered HWDSB's 2019–2020 Strategic Priorities in developing its recommendations, in particular the priorities specific to Positive Culture and Well-being; Student Learning and Achievement; Effective Communication; and Partnerships.

6.1 Recommendations

Organizing framework for the recommendations

The individual learner is at the centre of education and learning. A holistic response to bullying means recognizing that the student experiencing bullying, the student with bullying behaviours and the student witness all exist and interact within a complex system. Within this system, bullying behaviour is influenced either directly or indirectly by a wide range of relationships and settings, for example, school, home and peers, as well as broader social forces and structures such as institutional culture, community well-being and government funding. The review panel adopted a modified social-ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Espelage & Swearer, 2010) as an organizing framework for panel recommendations (see Figure 16). Recommendations address the different environments or contexts that influence bullying and healthy growth and development, including those at the level of the student; parents, guardians and caregivers; school; HWDSB organization; Hamilton community; and Ontario Ministry of Education.

Figure 16. Organizing framework for recommendations

Students

First and foremost, in light of the tragic circumstances that led to this review, it is clear that students must be placed at the centre of any HWDSB response. This means that students are to be recognized, valued and engaged as critical partners at every stage of the work ahead.

Bullying prevention and intervention practices and related student well-being initiatives must adequately address the realities, needs and strengths of all students, including those who identify with a cultural, racial, faith, sexual orientation, gender or ability identity that is outside the dominant socio-cultural norm or who are in other ways diverse and potentially at the margins. This is further reinforced by the results of the HWDSB Safe School Survey, which are discussed below.

Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP) is a framework that is endorsed by the Ontario Ministry of Education. CRRP equips educators with the tools and perspectives to build on the cultural experiences and assets of students so all students can be successful in school (Centre for Urban Schooling, n.d.). The review panel applauds HWDSB's inclusion of this model as an important part of its Positive Culture and Well-being strategy and anticipates its widespread adoption as a meaningful contributor to a culture of equity and excellence.

As noted in the CRRP framework, it is critical to ensure that schools are "places where students feel and believe that their ideas, opinions, perspectives, wants and needs are the basis for all that happens in the building" (Centre for Urban Schooling, n.d., p. 3). This belief underpins all of the recommendations and action steps in this report.

When thinking about school climate, the review panel used the Ministry of Education (2018a) definitions of the learning environment and relationships found within a school and school community. A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included, accepted and actively promote positive behaviours and interactions. Principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in the learning environment to support a positive school climate and a culture of mutual respect. From a bullying prevention and intervention perspective, a positive school climate is crucial to prevent inappropriate behaviour.

What the review panel heard and learned

- Bullying is a significant problem in HWDSB schools. According to the HWDSB Safe School Survey, 59.8% of HWDSB students reported being bullied at any rate and 19.7% (representing approximately 780 respondents) reported being bullied frequently in the prior school year (pre-COVID-19). Survey findings also indicated that involvement in bullying as a victim, perpetrator or witness tended to be associated with higher moral disengagement, lower perception of school safety, lower perception of adults who care in the school, lower perception of mattering and a poorer school climate across all reporters. Students who were bullied felt angry and sad and reported feeling like they could not stop it. The quality of their relationships with others also suffered.

- Certain groups experience bullying at higher rates. For example, survey findings from across all populations (students, parents, guardians, caregivers and staff) showed HWDSB students who identify as gender-diverse and/or Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ reported the highest rates of bullying victimization. Specifically, 72.7% of gender-diverse students and 67.6% of students who identified as Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ reported being bullied at any rate in the prior school year (pre-COVID-19). These results were further supported by the community consultation findings.

- Throughout the community consultation sessions, many students shared their experiences of being bullied. In particular, children and youth described at great length their experiences of bullying because of their race, ethnicity, newcomer status, disability, religion or Indigenous identity, and this became a predominant theme. Students and teachers from racialized and Black communities shared how they experienced bullying, discrimination and feelings of isolation because of their racial identities.

- Community consultation and survey findings both clearly describe the co-occurrence of bullying and discrimination in its many forms, including race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, family status, genetic characteristics and ability. This points to the need to seek out, listen to and learn from a multitude of student voices.

- Survey findings indicate that students who were bullied usually ignored the problem, walked away, or told a friend, parent or guardian. Sadly, when students told someone about their experiences of bullying victimization, things only got better about a third of the time. Similarly, during the community consultations, many students said that when they reported their bullying experience they were not believed or nothing happened.

- During the community consultation sessions, students reported experiencing bullying not only from their classmates but from their teachers.

- There is a need to involve students in identifying the level and type of bullying; in developing solutions; and in monitoring the impact. This is one of the most powerful things a school can do to prevent bullying (Jacob et al., 2020; Pepler & Craig, 2014).

- Students' advice to educators and school staff included asking them to pay attention to student interactions, check in with students frequently, and listen and take action when students report bullying.

With the above in mind, the panel makes the following recommendation at the student-level.

RECOMMENDATION #1: Increase student ownership and seek out and listen to student voices

Students have knowledge and expertise to contribute and should be recognized, valued and engaged as critical partners in the work ahead. As such, the review panel recommends HWDSB create the conditions for students to share ownership of their classroom, school climate and learning. The panel also recommends HWDSB elevate and assure safe conditions for student voices, agency and leadership. [12,13,14,15]

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12 Student voice is not simply about giving students the opportunity to communicate ideas and opinions; it is about students having opportunities to collaborate and make decisions with adults. Student agency is the level of autonomy and power that a student experiences in the learning environment. Student voice and agency are intrinsically linked. Agency gives students the power to direct and take responsibility for their learning, creating independent and self-regulating learners. Student leadership is not confined to a small group of individuals, as leadership potential is inherent in all learners. Student leadership includes listening to and being able to clarify the issues of the students they represent and advocating on their behalf. Trust, autonomy and relationships are enhanced through the development of leadership qualities.

13 See *The Students Commission of Canada* for valuable resources on ensuring that young people are valued, heard and their ideas for improving themselves, the lives of their peers and communities are put into action: https://www.studentscommission.ca/en

14 See Victoria State Government (Australia) AMPLIFY toolkit for a selection of student voice, agency and leadership resources : https://fuse.education.vic.gov.au/pages/amplify

15 See Child Trends (Jacob et al., 2020) tip sheet on student engagement: https://www.childtrends.org/publications/setting-the-foundation-for-safe-supportive-and-equitable-school-climates

Recommended action steps

1. Involve students in the co-creation, implementation and evaluation of all HWDSB bullying prevention and intervention activities and initiatives at the school-level and system-level, including reviewing and updating related policies and procedures. Examples include: involving students in the development of resources about how to be a bullying upstander;[16] encouraging learning about where and when school bullying takes place through a classroom- or peer-led mapping activity;[17] ensuring student leadership on safe school teams and the system-level steering committee; and gathering age-appropriate anonymous student feedback when evaluating school-level activities and programs.

2. Build on HWDSB's current expertise with student voice initiatives by establishing regular and consistent mechanisms for capturing student voices on the subjects of bullying and school climate. These mechanisms should be at both the school and system levels. They should use a range of accessible and interactive methods, with the School Climate Survey being only one example. These student voice initiatives should:

    a Seek out a range of student voices, including those of students whose cultural, racial, faith, sexual, gender, or ability identity is outside dominant socio-cultural norms, diverse and puts them potentially at the margins. This is essential, since student experiences of and perspectives on bullying often depend on their identities and demographics; there is no single student voice on bullying.

    b Create conditions that make students feel safe to share their experiences and perspectives, including anonymous ways to provide feedback and peer-led (and adult ally-supported) processes. Educators will need to assure students that all voices and opinions, including those that criticize existing school processes and structures, are valued and safeguarded.

    c Be specific to bullying and school climate and co-created with students, educators, unions and researchers with expertise in student voice and child and youth development. Ensure that student voices specific to bullying at the school level are collected frequently and consistently enough to monitor trends over time.

    d Include plans for sharing student voice findings with educators in iterative, meaningful and practical ways, such as providing school-level data, sharing examples of how the data informs practice, and offering opportunities for dialogue and sense-making.

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. (See Recommendation #4)

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.

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16 See WITS Program 'Act' stage resources for tips and exercises (https://witsprogram.ca/school/act/)

17 See PREVNet toolkit (Pepler & Craig, 2014) for a sample mapping activity (https://www.prevnet.ca/sites/prevnet.ca/files/prevnet_facts_and_tools_for_schools.pdf#page=33)

5. Share student voice data, such as from the School Climate Survey, with the full school community, including parents, guardians, caregivers and community partners. In keeping with the principles put forth in the Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy framework, demonstrate how student voices are used to inform school improvement processes and plans using clear, relatable examples, such as changes to reporting technologies, new recess activities or a new program. Co-develop these dissemination strategies with students and potentially with community partners.

6. Within the context of a whole-school approach (see Recommendation #4), 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[18] and PREVNet's What Kids Need to Know[19] resources.

7. Have students from Grades 4 to 12 participate as leaders on existing school improvement teams. With input from students, reflect upon the process, including criteria, for selecting student representatives to ensure students with 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 socio-cultural norms. With input from students, clearly outline student roles and contributions as well as the mechanisms that will be put into place to ensure safe conditions for student participation. In addition, collect age-appropriate data from younger children, for example, by asking them how they feel in school.

8. Student-led initiatives without adult support and resources are not helpful and may be harmful. Given this, 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 in bullying prevention and intervention planning processes and implementation activities, consider and include the perspectives and experiences of the student experiencing bullying victimization, the student with bullying behaviours and the student who witnesses bullying. This is especially important given the HWDSB Safe School Survey findings 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 these action steps are aligned with and included in the HWDSB Equity Action Plan as well as other appropriate student well-being initiatives, such as the Mental Health Strategy and Indigenous Education and Indigenous Cultural Safety.

11. In addition to the above, it is recommended students play a central role in developing and implementing all of the review panel's recommended action steps. See other review panel recommendations for details.

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18 WITS Bystander Quiz: https://witsprogram.ca/pdfs/families/bystander-quiz.pdf
19 PREVNet: https://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/kids and https://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/teens

Parents, guardians and caregivers

Children and youth are raised and cared for, both permanently and temporarily, by many types of caregivers other than biological parents, including foster parents, adoptive parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and parents' live-in partners. In recognition of diverse family formations and the importance of inclusive language, the review panel uses the phrase parents, guardians and caregivers to refer to the adults providing HWDSB students with care.

What the review panel heard and learned

- The HWDSB Safe School Survey findings show the overall proportions for HWDSB parent, guardian and caregiver reports of bullying victimization were high, with 88.0% reporting their child had been bullied at any rate and 41.0% reporting frequent bullying. The proportions of parents, guardians and caregivers indicating that their child had bullied others was 33.0% at any rate and 4.0% for frequent bullying. Survey findings were further reinforced by the qualitative community consultation data; parents, guardians and caregivers shared many stories of their children being bullied at school by other students as well as school staff.

- Community consultation findings as well as parent survey findings clearly describe the co-occurrence of bullying and discrimination in its many forms, such as, race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, family status, genetic characteristics, and ability. This underscores the need to seek out, listen to and learn from a multitude of parent, guardian and caregiver voices on bullying and to reflect their lived experience in both school-level and system-level responses to bullying.

- Distrust of and disappointment in the school system was a common theme emerging from the qualitative consultation data. Like students, parents, guardians and caregivers felt that when they reported their children's bullying experiences, they were not listened to or believed. They also described being frustrated by the lack of information shared by school principals and other administrators after a bullying incident was reported, and the inconsistent application of existing bullying policies and procedures. Parents, guardians and caregivers feel shut out of the process and want to see greater consistency and accountability in bullying reporting and response in schools.

- Although the majority of parents, guardians, caregivers and staff who participated in the survey were satisfied with the steps taken to prevent bullying by the schools and by HWDSB, review panel findings from both the qualitative community sessions and quantitative surveys demonstrate much more concerted effort is needed in this area.

- Parents, guardians and caregivers are essential partners in addressing bullying problems at school (Pepler & Craig, 2014; see also Chapter 3 Literature Review). For example, the survey findings indicate students who are bullied are more likely to seek help from a parent than they are a teacher. Parents, guardians and caregivers of children who bully should also play an important role in bullying intervention.

With the above in mind, the review panel makes the following recommendation at the level of parents, guardians and caregivers.

RECOMMENDATION #2: Involve parents, guardians and caregivers in bullying prevention and response in meaningful ways

In recognition of the critical role played by parents, guardians and caregivers, the review panel recommends HWDSB ensure parents, guardians and caregivers are meaningfully and continuously engaged in bullying prevention and intervention processes and initiatives at the student, school and system levels. This includes strengthening parent communication protocols specific to bullying reporting, intervention and responding.

Recommended action steps

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; the impact of bullying; specific examples of how to respond to bullying; and what parents, guardians and caregivers can do if their child bullies. See PREVNet[20], WITS[21], and Fourth R[22] websites for parent resources, including those specifically about cyberbulling.

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.[23]

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. This should include 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, the Parent Involvement Committee and Indigenous Education Councils) to participate in the development, implementation and evaluation of school climate initiatives and strengthen school-parent communication.

Action steps specific to strengthening communication with parents, guardians and caregivers, especially around bullying reporting and response and ensuring consistent application of existing bullying prevention and intervention policies and procedures, are captured under the school-level recommendations, specifically Recommendation #3, Recommendation #4, Recommendation #6 and Recommendation #7.

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20 PREVNet resources for parents: https://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/parents
21 WITS Program parent toolkit: https://witsprogram.ca/families/using-wits-with-your-child/wits-parent-toolkit-helpful-resources/
22 Fourth R webinars for parents: https://youthrelationships.org/pages/parent-webinars#series
23 Child Trends' (Jacob et al., 2020) tip sheet on family and community engagement offers important equity reflection questions to help inform engagement activities: https://www.childtrends.org/publications/setting-the-foundation-for-safe-supportive-and-equitable-school-climates

HWDSB schools

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, 1959) emphasize that children have a right to an education that is free from violence and discrimination. The Ontario Education Act specifies that the first responsibility of principals and teachers is to keep students safe; the second responsibility is to educate. Bullying is a significant problem within the school system but it is not solely a school problem — it is a societal issue causing harm well beyond schools. As a societal institution involved in child and youth development, schools are mandated to focus on educating the whole child, which not only includes the capacities for numeracy, literacy and science, but also the capacities for healthy relationships and active citizenship.

What the review panel heard and learned

- Bullying occurs between students, between staff and students, and between staff members. For example, Safe School Survey results (see Chapter 5) indicate that for the previous school year (pre-COVID):

    - 59.8% of students reported being bullied at any rate and 19.7% reported being bullied frequently.
    - 44.9% of surveyed staff reported seeing a staff member bully another staff member.
    - 30.8% of surveyed staff reported seeing a staff member bully a student.

- Bullying is a significant problem in HWDSB schools that affects all demographic groups and identities in different ways. Community consultation and survey findings both clearly describe the co-occurrence of bullying and discrimination in its many forms, such as race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, family status, genetic characteristics and ability. This indicates the need for an intersectional approach in which bullying prevention and intervention policies, activities and programming are recognized as inherently interconnected with equity and inclusion work.

- Bullying takes many different forms, including electronic or cyberbullying. The HWDSB Safe School Survey found reported rates of cyberbullying to be lower than reported rates of other forms of bullying, such as physical or verbal, during the prior school year (pre-COVID-19). The complexity and severity of the consequences following bullying are related more to the intensity and duration of the bullying, not the specific type or form of bullying (Haltigan & Vaillancourt, 2018). Cyberbullying presents unique risks to children and youth because it is anonymous, public, permanent and can occur 24 hours a day, seven days a week. These risks and the harm they cause are real and present, especially in light of the current blended model of education with a remote learning component, yet it is important to tackle cyberbullying within the context of a broad bullying prevention and intervention approach rather than creating specialized, siloed programs.

- Survey findings indicate bullying tends to happen among groups of students who are involved in all three roles (student being victimized, student perpetrator and student bystander) and who tend to struggle with the same developmental, safety and relationship issues. These are the students who are at greatest risk and need the most support.

- Bullying should be approached using a developmental lens. Students affected by and involved in bullying incidents, whether in the role of bully, victim or bystander, need support to develop social-emotional capacity. Although there should be consequences for bullying others, consequences need to be educational or developmental to ensure that students are learning and developing optimally (EDC, 2009; Pepler & Morgan, 2020; Swearer et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2017).

- Survey findings from students, parents, guardians, caregivers and staff all indicate that areas of low or no supervision were associated with higher bullying rates and feeling less safe. In particular, breaks and outside recess were hazardous. This finding was further corroborated by students, parents, guardians and caregivers during the community consultation sessions. For example, students talked about experiencing violence, name calling and feelings of fear in unsupervised areas such as buses, hallways and change rooms.

- Survey findings indicate that HWDSB students who were bullied pre-COVID were overrepresented in remote learning programs, suggesting they were choosing to avoid the social context of school (see Chapter 5 for details).

- Parents, guardians, caregivers and community partners stressed the need for clear, consistently applied and widely communicated policies and procedures for bullying prevention and intervention, as well as more transparent communication of response outcomes; they want people held to account when protocols are not followed.

- Educators want practical training and knowledge specific to bullying prevention and intervention, including restorative and circle approaches.

- Educators and principals are important champions for positive school climate and effective bullying response (Farrelly et al., 2017; Thornberg et al., 2020); yet the consultation findings indicate curriculum expectations, lack of specific bullying prevention and intervention training, poorly-matched leadership skills and multiple competing priorities are significant barriers to effective bullying prevention and intervention in schools.

- Participants in community- and school-based consultations alike spoke of the need for more and better mental health supports in schools, both to prevent bullying and to respond after bullying incidents.

- Evidence shows that addressing bullying in schools starts with prioritizing and supporting healthy relationships and creating a culture of caring where every adult in every school has the capacity and responsibility to address bullying (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016; Pepler & Craig, 2014; see also Chapter 3 Literature Review).

- A comprehensive bullying prevention and intervention approach should be data-informed, evidence-based, whole-school, and tiered, leveraging universal, selective and indicated programs and activities. A whole-school approach[24] brings everyone together to work toward creating a safe, inclusive and accepting school where bullying problems are prevented and handled effectively when they arise. A whole-school approach involves the

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24 See PREVNet's Bullying Prevention: Facts & Tools for Schools for a fulsome description of a whole-school approach to bullying prevention and intervention (https://www.prevnet.ca/resources/bullying-prevention-facts-and-tools-for-schools).

administration, teaching and other school staff, students, parents, guardians, caregivers, and the broader community (Pepler & Craig, 2014).

Over the years, Ontario school boards have been given access to the evidence-based tools and resources needed to address bullying in schools, such as PREVNet's Bullying Prevention: Facts & Tools for Schools (Pepler & Craig, 2014) or Safe@School,[25] yet uptake has been mixed. The review panel heard there is variation in the quality, comprehensiveness and consistency of bullying prevention and intervention efforts across HWDSB.

The panel learned that effective bullying prevention and intervention requires a holistic, coordinated approach involving collaborative actions at many levels within the organization, not a series of one-off measures.

With the above in mind, the review panel makes five recommendations directed at school-level programming and protocols.

RECOMMENDATION #3: Develop multi-tiered supports and programming

To ensure the best outcomes for students, the review panel recommends HWDSB work with bullying prevention experts, students, parents, guardians, caregivers and educators to develop a multi-tiered system of bullying prevention and intervention programs and protocols. The panel recommends that the programming and protocols are field-tested in 2021–2022 and rolled out across the system in subsequent years.

Recommended action steps

1. Establish a bullying prevention and intervention lead position at the board. This position will lead system-level content and process efforts to create a culture of caring. Accountability will be shared with the board's senior leadership team.

2. Create a board-wide framework that establishes overarching expectations and procedures for a multi-tiered system of bullying prevention and intervention supports and programming, including:

   a Activities and supports at three levels, leveraging universal, selective and indicated programs and activities (see Figure 17).

   Examples of Tier 1 (universal) activities and supports designed for the majority of students are:

   • Evidence-informed universal approaches and programs based on student needs, such as WITS, Fourth R and Roots of Empathy. See the full literature review, Bullying in Childhood and Adolescence: Literature Review for the HWDSB Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel, for more examples.
   • Activities and programs aimed at addressing internet safety and cyberbullying, such as Media Smarts[26], Get Cyber Safe[27] and resources from PREVNet[28], WITS[29] and the Ministry of Education.

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25 Safe@School was a provincial project launched in 2007 led by the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) and the Centre ontarien de prévention des agressions (COPA) and funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education. See website for a wide range of safe schools resources: https://www.safeatschool.ca/
26 Media Smarts https://mediasmarts.ca/
27 Get Cyber Safe https://www.getcybersafe.gc.ca/en/home
28 PREVNet PRIMUS: http://cyberbullying.primus.ca/
29 WITS https://witsprogram.ca/school/best-cyberbullying-resources/

- Caring and inclusive classroom environments where bullying prevention education is embedded in classroom instruction.
- Student-led, adult-supported bullying prevention initiatives.
- Specialized supports and strategies that promote safety for students who identify as Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+.
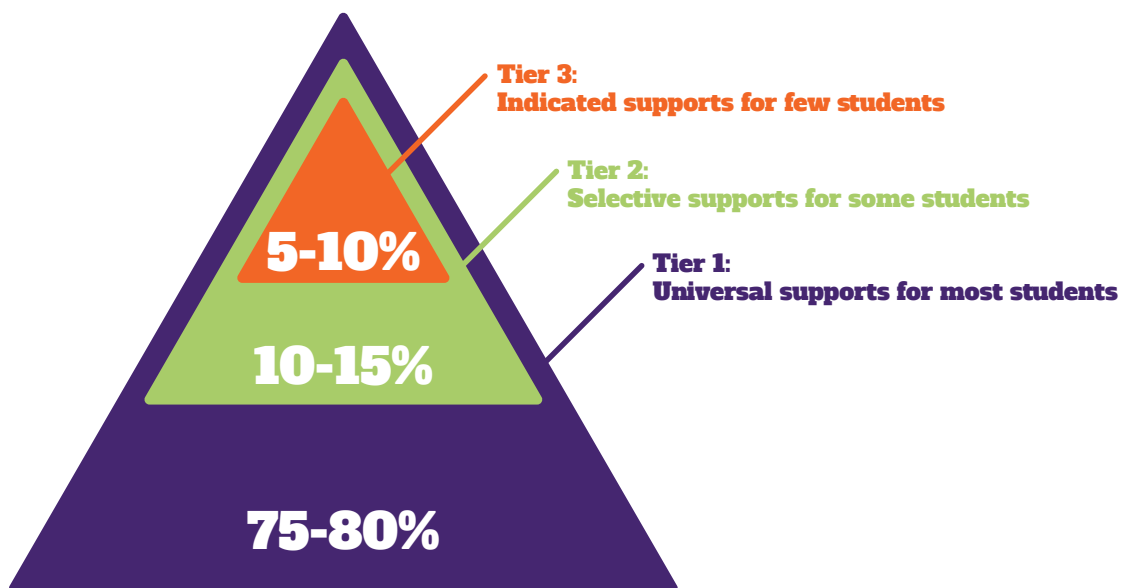
Examples of Tier 2 (selective) activities and supports for students showing moderate problems:

- Focused and timely intervention specifically designed to address and prevent the continuation of peer relationship problems, such as individualized coaching and support for all students involved in bullying (the students who are victimized, students who bully and students who witness). The goals of these interventions are to build resiliency, support strengths and enhance relationship skills.

Example of Tier 3 (indicated) supports for students who are significantly impacted:

- Intensive interventions are required, such as intensive social-emotional and mental health supports and restorative practices. These interventions may require additional support from community mental health services and community agencies.

Figure 17. Multi-tiered system of supports for bullying prevention and intervention

Tier 3:
Indicated supports for few students

Tier 2:
Selective supports for some students

Tier 1:
Universal supports for most students

5-10%

10-15%

75-80%

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. This means considering a student's multiple identity layers and the role of social and structural inequities, and requires recognizing and working to remedy interlocking systems of oppression alongside bullying prevention and intervention. Seek

opportunities to work in alignment with other HWDSB student well-being initiatives, including HWDSB's Equity Action Plan, Indigenous Education and Indigenous Cultural Safety, mental health, special education, and other safe schools activities.

e. Continue with those existing bullying prevention and intervention practices that were identified as important and successful during the community consultations, including restorative approaches, the TipOff anonymous bullying reporting telephone number, HWDSB Helps resources and the 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.

4. Develop the tools and resources to support schools in developing their own bullying prevention and intervention plans using the PREVNet whole-school approach[30] and other whole-school resources.[31] (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.

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30 PREVNet (prevnet.ca) is *Canada's Healthy Relationships Hub* and one of several available resources to utilize when developing a whole-school approach to bullying prevention and intervention. The PREVNet website has a wide range of practical tips and strategies to use at home and in the classroom. It has also created a checklist to enable schools and school boards to assess the adequacy of their respective prevention and intervention plans and assist with plan implementation. HWDSB should employ this checklist, as well as other toolkit checklists, as part of the ongoing process of developing and refining its own prevention and intervention plan. https://www.prevnet.ca/resources/bullying-prevention-facts-and-tools-for-schools

31 Additional resources on a whole-school approach include: ChildTrends' Setting the Foundation for Safe, Supportive, and Equitable School Climates https://www.childtrends.org/publications/setting-the-foundation-for-safe-supportive-and-equitable-school-climates; and Thames Valley District School Board's Safe Schools tool kit and other resources found at https://sites.google.com/gotvdsb.ca/tvdsbsafeschools/home

RECOMMENDATION #4: Support schools so they can establish their own bullying prevention and intervention plans

To ensure a safe and supportive learning environment for all students and staff, the review panel recommends HWDSB provide schools with the time, information, tools and resources to develop, implement and evaluate their own school-led, student-centred bullying prevention and intervention plans. These plans should use the PREVNet whole-school approach (Pepler & Craig, 2014) and draw from specialized bullying supports and resources as needed.

Recommended action steps

1. Ensure that school improvement plans prioritize positive culture and well-being and contain a feasible number of goals with clear measurable targets, for example a maximum of two goals with one already included in the board's Annual Plan.

2. Immediately explore alternative sources of additional adult supervision outside of the classroom during non-instructional time. 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.

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 to bullying prevention and intervention.[32] 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:

    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.

    b. Education for all students and staff. Education should be ongoing, interactive and offered at least annually. It should 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. It should 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.

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32 See PREVNet's Bullying Prevention: Facts & Tools for Schools for a fulsome description of a whole school approach to bullying prevention and intervention (https://www.prevnet.ca/resources/bullying-prevention-facts-and-tools-for-schools)

c. Essential structures and processes. These should support building and strengthening school-level partnerships with those who share a common interest in addressing bullying. Structures and processes 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.

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.

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[33] 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 HWDSB's Equity Action Plan, Indigenous Education and Indigenous Cultural Safety, mental health, special education and other safe schools initiatives.

The review panel makes the following recommendation, which is specific to the special education plan, in recognition that:

- 1 in 4 students with a disability in Canada have been bullied in school because of their disability and 1 in 10 students end their education early because of their disability (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2017).

- The existing curriculum and school structures result in feelings of isolation among students with special education needs. This is a finding from the review panel's public consultation sessions.

RECOMMENDATION #5: Examine special education practices from a student-centred learning perspective

To ensure inclusive learning environments, the review panel recommends HWDSB continue to review and refine the special education plan, specifically the impact of self-contained classes,[34] in keeping with research and best practices on student learning, belonging and engagement.

Recommended action steps

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.

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33 See PREVnet tip sheet for school staff on how to identify and respond to bullying (https://www.prevnet.ca/sites/prevnet.ca/files/teasing_vs._bullying_tip-sheet_2018.pdf).

34 A self-contained or special education class is one of the options that may be considered by an Identification, Placement and Review Committee when making a placement decision for a student identified as an exceptional pupil. Categories and exceptionalities include behavioural, communicational, intellectual and multiple.

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.

A whole-school approach to addressing bullying also includes the adoption and consistent application of bullying prevention and intervention policies. Policies and programs work in tandem to communicate behavioural expectations for everyone involved in the daily activities of a school (Olweus, 1993).

With the above in mind, the review panel makes the following two recommendations specific to bullying prevention and intervention policies and procedures.

RECOMMENDATION #6: Review policies and procedures from equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression perspectives

In recognition of historical and present-day systemic discrimination against identified groups, the review panel recommends HWDSB examine existing bullying policies and procedures, including guidelines and codes of conduct, through the following lenses: equity, inclusiveness, anti-oppression and anti-racism (including anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism and anti-Islamophobia). This examination should be performed in collaboration with others and pay particular attention to HWDSB's policies and procedures for bullying reporting and responding.

Recommended action steps

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.[35]

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 microaggressions, is explicitly defined.[36]

   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. Related conduct includes the misuse of social media to further demean the person bullied.

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35 Child Trends' (Jacob et al., 2020) tip sheet on policy and policy enforcement offers important equity reflection questions to help inform the review of safe schools policy: https://www.childtrends.org/publications/setting-the-foundation-for-safe-supportive-and-equitable-school-climates

36 Racist bullying includes ridiculing, tormenting, threatening or making fun of someone because of physical attributes such as skin colour, hair or facial features; customs; religion; food; accents; language; and cultural or religious background or traditions (see http://www.endbullying.org.uk/what-is-bullying/preju-dice-based-bullying/racial-bullying/) for more information.

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,[37] 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.[38]

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[39] is an example.

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

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37 See PREVNet's anonymous letter to adults template (https://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/kids/letter)

38 See PREVNet's Bullying Prevention: Facts & Tools for Schools p. 103 for their Bullying Identification and Intervention tool (https://www.prevnet.ca/sites/prevnet.ca/files/prevnet_facts_and_tools_for_schools.pdf#page=103)

39 See PREVNet tip sheet on bullying identification (https://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/educators/the-difference-between-teasing-and-bullying)

is imposed. 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.

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.

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.

RECOMMENDATION #7: Ensure policies and procedures are followed consistently

To ensure a safe and positive school climate[40] for all students and staff, the review panel recommends that HWDSB address inconsistent adherence to existing bullying prevention and intervention policies, practices and guidelines, including codes of conduct.

Recommended action steps

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,[41] 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 a clear understanding of 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.

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

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40 A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included and accepted, and positive behaviours and interactions are actively promoted. Principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in the learning environment to support a positive school climate and a culture of mutual respect (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018a).

41 Mitigating factors and other circumstances include a student's ability to control their behaviour; ability to understand the foreseeable consequences of their behaviour; age; stage of social development; special education needs; history; and the circumstances of the behaviour (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018b).

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.

HWDSB organization: System-level

The above actions will not have the intended impact unless organizational conditions for success are in place. While the review panel heard examples of best practice existing within schools and pockets of excellence and expertise that can be built on, there is a perception, articulated by a number of participants in this process, that HWDSB lacks a clear and prominently stated set of core organizational values. This has, in part, fostered an organizational culture that some stakeholders describe as "traditional, top-down management" and has led to wide variation in practice and accountability across the organization.

These organizational conditions, while not unusual for a large institution, undermine even the best action plans and strategies.[42] As a result, they require comment from the review panel as a precondition for change at HWDSB.

Panelists heard that "the present structures and processes" are not sufficient to deal with bullying and other deep-rooted issues and that attempts to do so as individuals "will lead potentially to significant educator burnout."

> *"Tinkering with the system or attempting to deal with individual issues in isolation, i.e. bullying, will ultimately not lead to long-term fundamental transformation necessary to prepare the system and therefore the students for a future very different from the one for which many of us were prepared."*
> *— External expert advisor*

A change in school climate to one based on a culture of caring is predicated on a demonstrable long-term, ongoing commitment to holistic student well-being from HWDSB leadership (Kania et al., 2018; Smit, 2018; Smit & Scherman, 2016).

The following principles guide the delivery of education in Newfoundland and Labrador (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Education, 2020) and serve as useful examples in this regard:

- Students and educators have the right to a safe, healthy, inclusive and accessible teaching and learning environment.

- Students have equitable access to authentic teaching and learning opportunities responsive to their needs.

- Educators have access to collaborative and reflective learning experiences designed to improve teaching and learning.

- Members of the school community honour each other's experiences, insights and contributions and share the common goal of success for all students.

Furthermore, Díaz-Gibson and Daly (2020) propose that:

> *Social relationships are a precious capital to be cultivated in our schools and communities, and underscore the need to weave a caring and supportive environment where every young person and adult can thrive. Caring relationships between all members of the educational community including students and families are crucial drivers of educational change and improvement…. As such, weaving educational ecosystems [see Figure 18] and social networks in our schools,*

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42 See School Mental Health Ontario's top 10 organizational conditions for sustained high-quality practices in school mental health and well-being: https://smho-smso.ca/school-and-system-leaders/learn-more/mental-health-leadership-strategies/set-the-stage-with-organizational-conditions/

districts and cities has become one of the greatest worldwide challenges and opportunities for our systems focused on enhancing learning and creating increased access and a deeper focus on equity.[43]

Figure 18. The SchoolWeavers Tool model for cultivating and facilitating ecosystems that enhance learning and equity (Díaz-Gibson et al., 2020)
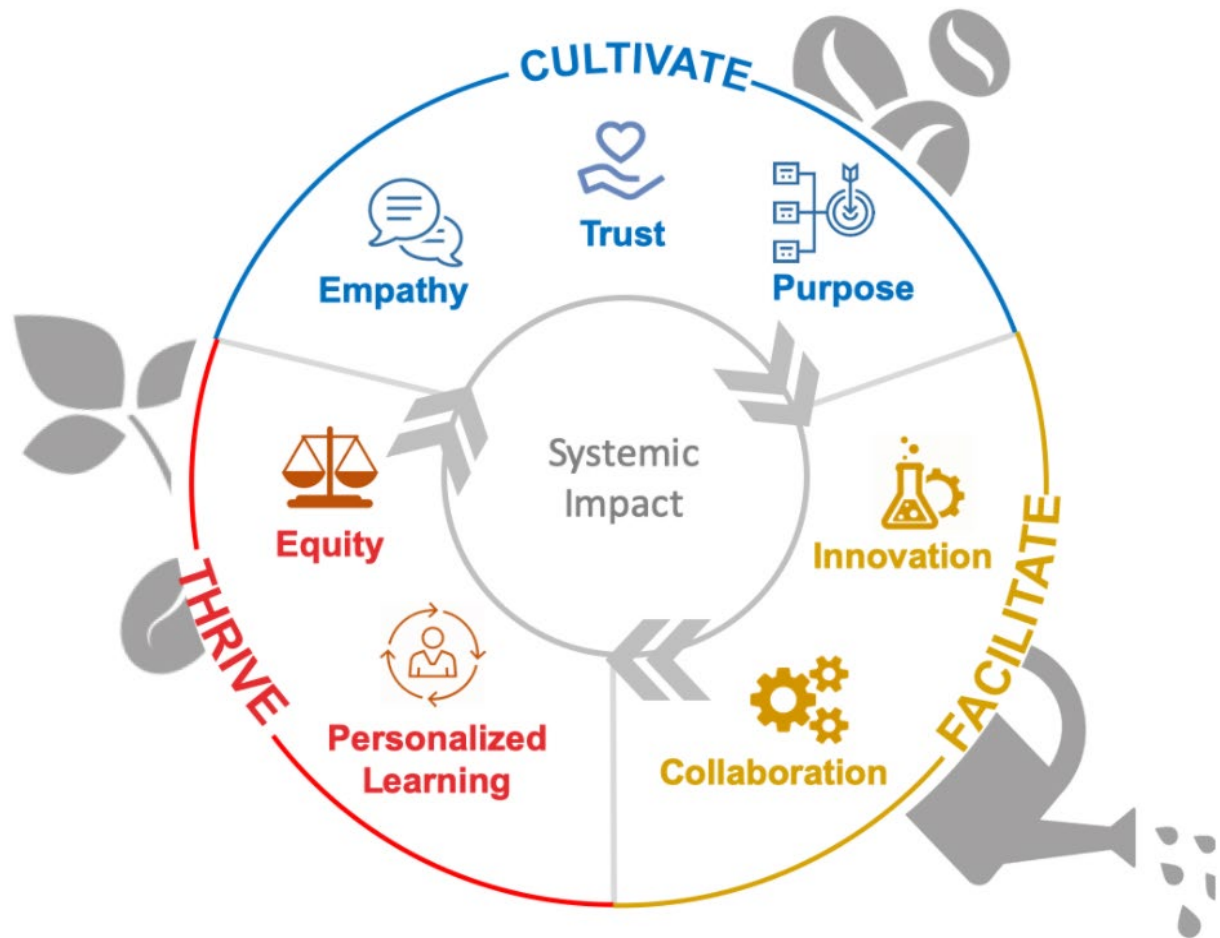
HWDSB's commitment to equity, caring, excellence and the pursuit of continuous quality improvement must continue to permeate the entire organization. Trustees, senior leadership, educators and staff must demonstrate a commitment to student well-being that matches or even exceeds the current commitment to literacy and math.

In the words of one consultation participant, it's time for HWDSB to **"move from protecting the brand to protecting the student."**

What we heard during the consultation has led the review panel to make two recommendations aimed at the organizational level.

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43 From "A letter to school leaders" available at https://www.wise-qatar.org/a-letter-to-school-leaders/

RECOMMENDATION #8: Set the foundation for a culture of caring

To guide the necessary organizational culture change to one of pervasive caring, accountability and transparency, the review panel recommends that HWDSB create a commitment statement with clear and measurable goals specific to bullying prevention and intervention; develop core organizational values that embrace a culture of caring; and establish ongoing monitoring and transparent reporting processes specific to bullying and positive school climate.[44] These should be developed with students.

Recommended action steps

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. The statement should include clear and measurable goals.

2. Establish, with input from students, parents, guardians, caregivers and staff, a set of core organizational values and operational principles that will ensure a culture of caring and respect.

3. Establish oversight and accountability structures at the school, system/HWDSB, governance and community levels. Build on existing, aligned structures where appropriate and indicate where new structures are needed. Structures should be:

   • **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 and 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. Localized school-based climate assessments will help schools tailor their bullying prevention and intervention activities and approaches.[45]

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44 A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included and accepted, and they actively promote positive behaviours and interactions. Principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in the learning environment to support a positive school climate and a culture of mutual respect (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018a).

45 See Child Trends' (Jacob et al., 2020) tip sheet on data and data-based decision making within the context of safe schools activities including important equity reflection questions: https://www.childtrends.org/publications/setting-the-foundation-for-safe-supportive-and-equitable-school-climates

RECOMMENDATION #9: Strengthen the leadership skills needed for culture change

Meaningful change happens from the top down and bottom up. Therefore, the review panel recommends HWDSB review their leadership strategy to ensure it includes training and coaching focused on the knowledge and skills necessary to bring about a sustained culture of caring and accountability, with emphasis on modelling the behaviours desired for students.

Recommended action steps

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.[46]

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.

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46 See Fullan (2019) for commentary on leadership in times of disruption and uncertainty.

Hamilton community

What the review panel heard and learned

Bullying manifests in schools but is not exclusive to them. Schools alone cannot be expected to reshape the larger societal factors that lead to bullying. But schools do play a unique role in the lives of children and families. As such, they have an enhanced responsibility to engage with, support and listen to those promoting community-wide efforts in Hamilton and to participate in and help shape their work for change.

When thinking about community partners, the review panel was encouraged to consider a far-ranging and inclusive list of large and small community service providers and groups. A community partner could be any group or individual interested in learning about bullying and reducing its impact in the community, including local associations, unions, mental health specialists, faith-based organizations, businesses, academics and the neighbourhoods in which schools are located and students live.

Currently there are a number of ways that HWDSB partners with community groups and organizations. However, participants in the community consultations told the review panel that the school system needs to be open to additional opportunities to be creative and innovative together in the name of improving student engagement, achievement and well-being. The review panel also heard very clearly that without dedicated resources to nurture and sustain school-community partnerships, even highly successful initiatives could get lost.

> *"It's not about grand pronouncements. It's about doing the work and resourcing it appropriately in schools and it is about not losing focus when a program is working but encounters new challenges or competing priorities."*
> *— Community service provider*

To this end, the review panel heard that initiatives cannot be conceived or sustained by asking more of people, teams and schools that are already stretched. Instead, more time and dedicated people with community competencies are needed to do the work. Given the importance of this work to communities, students and families, proper resourcing cannot be ignored.

The message was clear: there are a multitude of challenges facing students today. Schools may not be the sole keeper of the opportunities and supports that students need to "realize their potential and develop into highly skilled, knowledgeable, caring citizens who contribute to their society" (Ontario Education Act, 1990). Recent education research (Díaz-Gibson et al., 2020) indicates that communities that have responded in innovative, effective and resilient ways to the COVID-19 crisis are among those that have shown greater collaboration between school and community partners. This finding underscores the need to work together to create a caring and supportive environment where every young person and adult can thrive. An example is the NetEdu global movement's SchoolWeavers Tool,[47] which is designed to support school leaders and their communities in efforts to strengthen their partnerships.

Accountable, responsible and innovative partnerships are possible when school boards maintain their ultimate obligations to students with support and expertise from a range of community partners. There are ideas from outside the formal education system that, when developed and delivered collaboratively, can achieve the board's goals in innovative ways.

In the words of community partners: "Respect the resources we can bring" and "we can do better together."

With the above in mind, the review panel makes the following recommendation at the community-level.

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47 See NetEdu Project SchoolWeavers Tool (https://www.neteduproject.org/weaving-circle-for-systemic-impact/)

RECOMMENDATION #10: Work with a wide range of community partners

Recognizing that bullying is a community issue with shared responsibility, the review panel recommends HWDSB set clear, publicly available goals that show how the board will actively build new partnerships and further develop existing partnerships within and across Hamilton to address bullying and ensure a positive school climate.

Recommended action steps

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.[48]

    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.

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48 For more information on the City of Hamilton's Hate Prevention and Mitigation Initiative visit https://www.hamilton.ca/city-initiatives/priority-projects/hate-prevention-mitigation-initiative.

e. Continuing to participate in and contribute to Hamilton's Early Years Community Plan at both the strategic and operational levels.

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.

Ministry of Education

Just as schools are not alone in addressing both the root causes and day-to-day incidents of bullying in our community, Hamilton, too, is not alone in its efforts to stem bullying. There are levers at the provincial level of government that must be pulled.

Feedback from school staff, administrators and community partners provided insight into the role the Ministry of Education could play to support effective bullying prevention and intervention and positive school climate efforts.

What the review panel heard and learned

- To be effective, positive school climate work requires dedicated time and resources.

- The pressures educators experience to follow Ontario curriculum expectations can pre-occupy them such that they have little time, expertise or ability to engage in positive school climate work and embed social and emotional learning in the classroom.

- The Ministry of Education has a role to play in addressing issues of direct supervision.

With the above in mind, the review panel makes the following recommendation at the community-level.

RECOMMENDATION #11: Ask the Ministry of Education for support

To support conditions that prioritize safe and accepting schools, the review panel recommends HWDSB seek commitment from the Ministry of Education to provide school boards with the resources required to ensure school board plans can be thoroughly developed, implemented and sustained.

Recommended action steps

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.

To implement the review panel's recommendations, HWDSB will require Grants for Student Needs (GSN) program funding of $1.2 to $1.5 million annually. This is the minimum required to cover costs associated with having a system lead position; additional consultants that support safe schools, equity, and mental health; release time for professional development; and additional implementation costs at the school level such as restorative practices, specialized supports and universal programs.

Guiding principles for implementation

Addressing bullying will require ongoing dedication and hard work across HWDSB. While it is important to recognize that the review panel's recommendations are being offered during a time when HWDSB is dealing with multiple priorities, not the least of which is the COVID-19 pandemic, nothing is more important than the safety and well-being of students.

The review panel's 11 recommendations will help further HWDSB work in four of its five current strategic priorities, specifically:

- Positive Culture and Well-Being, especially the goal of all students and staff feeling safe, supported and accepted.

- Student Learning and Achievement, given that bullying victimization is associated with poor academic achievement.

- Effective Communication, as well as the 2018–2021 Strategic Communications and Engagement Plan's vision of fostering engagement by building trust, nurturing relationships and maintaining the confidence of the Hamilton community.

- Partnerships, especially since effective school-community partnerships specific to bullying prevention and intervention will enhance opportunities for students.

Planning how the recommendations will be implemented is the responsibility of HWDSB, but it is important this work take place with the input and involvement of students, parents, guardians, caregivers, educators, other staff and key community partners, as well as the Ministry of Education.

The principles that guided the development of the review panel's recommendations should also inform their implementation. Thus, the values and beliefs from the start of this chapter are repeated here.

1. **Healthy relationships, healthy development.** Nurturing, caring relationships are critical to child and youth well-being as well as a thriving education community; this includes healthy relationships between students, students and staff, and staff members.

2. **Equity and excellence.** Pursuit of high-quality experiences and outcomes for all requires identifying and removing discriminatory biases and systemic barriers at all levels.

3. **Values-focused culture.** It is important to develop and constantly monitor a widely shared institutional culture of care that places the well-being of all students and staff at its core.

4. **Engagement and collaboration.** The best solutions are co-created, with meaningful and representative input and involvement from key stakeholders, especially students, parents, guardians, caregivers, educators, other staff and community partners.

5. **Data-informed, evidence-based.** Insights and evidence drawn from data collection, research and acknowledged best practices are consistently used to inform decision making; efforts are made to improve outcomes frequently and iteratively.

6. **Systems-focus.** Bullying is understood and treated as a system-wide phenomenon that results in a pervasive negative climate; solutions must change the climate as well as institutional structures and processes, not just deal with individual incidents.

7. **Consistency, transparency and ongoing communication.** Success requires clear roles and processes, and consistent application of policies and practices. To build trust, communication must be frequent, accessible, transparent, honest and open.

8. **Sustained implementation, accountability and continuous quality improvement.** It is important to commit to long-term solutions; an ongoing implementation process with clearly established accountability mechanisms involving students, parents, guardians, caregivers and community partners; and a continuous quality improvement framework.

Immediate actions

Some of the review panel's recommendations will take longer to develop and implement, especially those where the work requires meaningful input from or involvement of students, parents, guardians, caregivers, educators and community partners. However, some of the work can get started right away, especially the action steps that involve establishing the processes and structures to support a systematic approach to dealing with bullying.

With this in mind, the review panel has outlined 10 immediate action steps.

1. **Share report findings and recommendations.** Widely distribute the review panel findings and recommendations in formats that are accessible, easy to read and understandable.

2. **Create a lead position.** Create a bullying and positive school climate lead position to focus on system-level efforts to create a culture of caring and accountability at HWDSB. This supervisory officer or system principal will be entirely dedicated to leading and supporting the implementation of the recommendations. They will serve as content and process lead with accountability being shared by the senior leadership team.

3. **Align the work.** Identify areas of alignment between the review panel recommendations and HWDSB's other plans and programs to integrate and streamline related work at the school level where appropriate. Strive for alignment with the HWDSB Equity Action plan, Mental Heath Strategy, Indigenous Education and Indigenous Cultural Safety, and special education programs. In addition, because these standalone areas of work share a common goal of student well-being and are stronger when they inform one another, examine current organizational structures to maximize alignment of and connections between the five areas of work.

4. **Raise awareness.** Adopt the updated definition of bullying used during the review panel process. Develop age-appropriate illustrations that explain bullying and how to respond to it as a bystander, friend, ally and educator; these resources should be co-created with students. Distribute the educational resources across the HWDSB community.

5. **Make a commitment.** Develop a commitment statement specific to bullying prevention and intervention and the right of every child to have an education that is free from violence and discrimination (Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child). Establish timelines and clear targets, such as having recommended structures and processes in place by a certain date or reducing bullying prevalence by half by a certain date. Establish core organizational values that ensure a culture of caring and respect. Engage students, parents, guardians, caregivers and educators in this process.

6. **Monitor and report school-level bullying data.** Collect school-level disaggregated data by identity on all formally and informally reported incidents of bullying and report them every six months to the dedicated lead position and annually to the Board of Trustees.[49] Encourage full participation in School Climate surveys and share results with students, parents, guardians, caregivers and the general public.

7. **Address areas of low/no supervision.** 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.

8. **Outline oversight and accountability mechanisms.** Outline the oversight and accountability structure at the school, system/HWDSB, governance and community levels. Build on existing, aligned structures where appropriate and indicate where new structures are needed.

   - Form a system-level steering committee charged with overseeing the implementation of review panel recommendations, with broad membership representing students, parents, guardians, caregivers, educators, unions and community partners. The committee should include at least one community advocacy group specifically focused on bullying. Consider a student and/or advocacy group co-chair (see Recommendation #8.3).

9. **Establish community-level accountability.** Develop a community-led, independent table with broad representation, including HWDSB representatives, to oversee the implementation, at the highest level, of review panel recommendations (see recommendation #10.3).

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49 It is important to recognize it will take time to reduce the number of bullying incidents in HWDSB schools. At first, expect an increase in the number of reported incidents as an indication of higher levels of awareness and understanding of what constitutes bullying as well as greater adherence to reporting protocols.
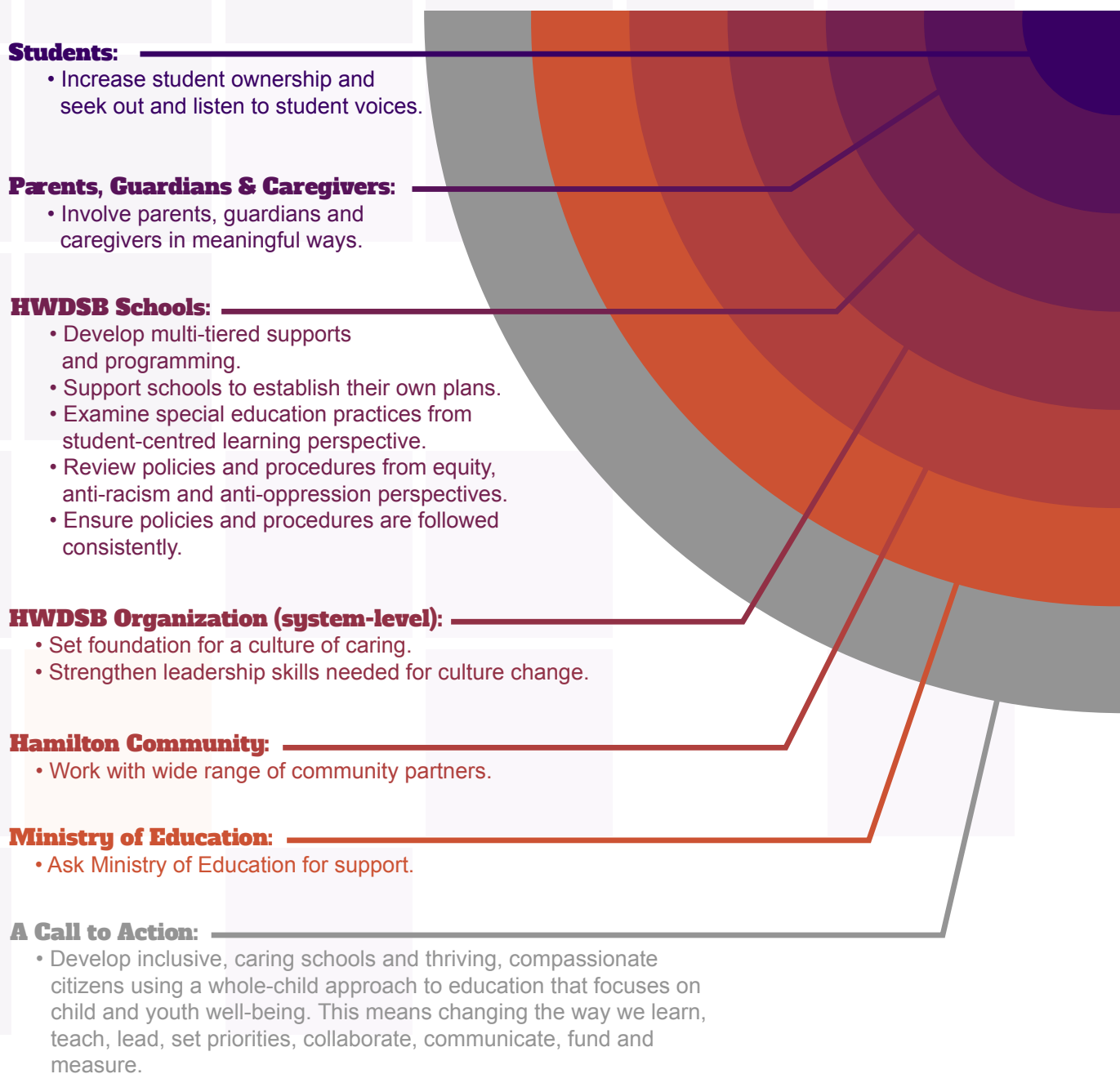
10. Ensure specialized supports for students affected by bullying. Ensure the Nurturing Safer Schools: A Social Work Intervention[50] pilot project in Grades 6 to 8 and its evaluation moves ahead in spring 2021.

Review panel follow-up

Effective bullying prevention and intervention requires action at all levels (Figure 19). As a follow-up to its final report, the review panel proposes to return to trustees and senior leadership at six-month intervals for the first 12 to 18 months. This follow-up would happen in consultation with the Director and on a volunteer basis. The first six-month check-in could focus on sharing knowledge gained through experience with those who will have responsibility for overseeing implementation. The 12- and 18-month check-ins would be consultations on progress.

Figure 19. Effective bullying prevention and intervention requires action at all levels

Students:
- Increase student ownership and seek out and listen to student voices.

Parents, Guardians & Caregivers:
- Involve parents, guardians and caregivers in meaningful ways.

HWDSB Schools:
- Develop multi-tiered supports and programming.
- Support schools to establish their own plans.
- Examine special education practices from student-centred learning perspective.
- Review policies and procedures from equity, anti-racism and anti-oppression perspectives.
- Ensure policies and procedures are followed consistently.

HWDSB Organization (system-level):
- Set foundation for a culture of caring.
- Strengthen leadership skills needed for culture change.

Hamilton Community:
- Work with wide range of community partners.

Ministry of Education:
- Ask Ministry of Education for support.

A Call to Action:
- Develop inclusive, caring schools and thriving, compassionate citizens using a whole-child approach to education that focuses on child and youth well-being. This means changing the way we learn, teach, lead, set priorities, collaborate, communicate, fund and measure.

6.2 Call to action

"Each of us, as citizens, has a role to play in creating a better world for our children."

— Nelson Mandela

Bullying is a systemic issue that causes significant harm and demands concerted action on many fronts. Beyond the immediate sense of harm, it has significant long-term negative impacts on mental and physical health, academic achievement and future life prospects of young people. Bullying affects not only those who experience it but also those who perpetrate it and those who witness it.

The HWDSB Safe School Survey (see Section 5) found the prevalence of bullying victimization among students was very high, with 59.8% of surveyed students reporting being bullied by others at any rate (pre-COVID) and 19.7% reporting being bullied frequently (pre-COVID). Yet bullying is not a problem unique to Hamilton; similar stories and concerns can be heard across Ontario and Canada.

Canada has some of the best economic, environmental and social conditions for growing up, but very poor outcomes for children and youth. For example, the most recent UNICEF report card on child well-being (UNICEF Canada, 2020) found Canada ranked 30th out of 38 wealthy countries in overall well-being. More specifically:

- 20% of young people in Canada are frequently bullied (placing Canada 23rd in rankings).

- Canada has one of the highest rates of adolescent suicide (ranking 35th).

- A striking number of children in Canada are unhappy (placing Canada 31st in rankings).

- Almost 1 in 3 children in Canada is overweight or obese (ranking 29th).

- Almost 1 in 4 children in Canada has low life satisfaction (ranking Canada 28th).

- 26% of young people in Canada have difficulty making friends (ranking 23rd).

- Almost 1 in 3 young people in Canada do not have basic reading and math skills by age 15 (ranking 13th).

- Canada's governments spend less on families and children than most wealthy countries (ranking 28th).

Notwithstanding the efforts of many dedicated people, including educators, educational professionals, community partners and researchers, it has been difficult to achieve progress with respect to bullying prevention and intervention and overall child well-being.

Although the review panel's primary mandate pertained to bullying prevention, intervention, reporting and responding, it is important to acknowledge the broader systemic issues that perpetuate bullying and hinder efforts to ensure the healthy growth and development of our children and youth.

Basic school structures have not changed for decades, despite increased mandates to respond to individual student needs, the de-institutionalization of care for many children with disabilities, very high retention rates and the acceptance of the responsibility to educate all children in the province. In order to adjust to changes in society or, at the very least, attempt to mitigate their negative impact, schools must be able to evolve their structures and processes.

Since the last major review of public education in the province, there have been significant societal and technological changes that have necessitated some fundamental changes in curriculum delivery. Other important issues are the long-term system implications of changes in delivery due to COVID-19; issues of equity, including racism in many forms; the increased responsibility of schools for the well-being and mental health of students; and the skill development all educators require to respond.

It is dangerous to assume the present structures and processes will be sufficient to deal with these tensions; on the contrary, it may lead to significant educator burnout. Tinkering with the system or attempting to deal with individual issues in isolation will not lead to the long-term fundamental transformation that is necessary to prepare the system and the students for a very different future.

Rincon-Gallardo (2020) argues that conventional schooling is detrimental to student well-being and learning and points out that unless the "default culture of schooling is replaced with cultures of robust learning, student well-being efforts will simply reproduce the very problems they seek to solve" (p. 454). As he points out, "learning to be taught and learning to learn are two very different things" (p. 459).

It is time to shift gears. It is time to transform and reimagine education with new ideas and approaches. It is time for a new moral imperative for education wherein learners are supported in learning, in their education and in society so they become good at learning and good at life (Fullan, Quinn & McEachen, 2018). It is time for an education system where socio-emotional development, equity, and mental health and well-being are seen as learning priorities alongside educational achievement outcomes. It is time for a system in which all students feel they are cared for, belong, and can contribute, knowing they are surrounded by support (People for Education, 2020).

The way forward involves transformational change of systems, cultures and mental models. It requires collective responses and a focus on well-being, personal development and equity.

The review panel, echoing the feedback received through the review process from a wide range of individuals, groups and communities, issues this call to action:

> *It is time to take real action, together, to develop inclusive, caring schools and thriving, compassionate citizens using a whole-child approach to education. This means changing the way we learn, teach, lead, set priorities, collaborate, communicate, fund and measure. We must pay attention to child and youth well-being. Question our assumptions. Invite all perspectives. Support each other's efforts. Bring in outside resources. And never look away. We call upon all Hamiltonians — students, parents, guardians, caregivers, school staff, unions, board employees, trustees, community members, community groups and researchers — as well as all levels of government to contribute to these changes as part of the village it takes to raise a child.*

The urgency of the issue means there is no time for blame. Everyone has a role to play in addressing bullying and its root causes. Here are some examples.

Students

- Be active builders of positive relationships in your school community.

- Treat others as you would wish to be treated yourselves.

- Continue to speak up, ask for choices and co-create solutions.

Parents, guardians and caregivers

- Be caring adults, not only for those in your care, but for all the children in the school community.

- Be vigilant and take a restorative justice and developmental approach to nurturing non-bullying behaviours in the children in your care, whether they are the perpetrators or targets of bullying.

Educators and other school staff

- Embrace processes and structures that help to ensure every student has an adult advocate to guide them along their developmental continuum and to whom they can go when in need.

- Ensure that every child is known, understood and that decisions made about the child include the child wherever possible.

- Ensure everyone is treated equitably.

HWDSB

- Create an organizational culture committed to values that include prioritizing the well-being of students.

- Deeply analyze the complex societal issues that underlie bullying in schools and work in partnership with students to transform them in the school context.

- Be open to new ideas from outside the organization and commit to working together for creative solutions.

Unions

- Contribute to the co-creation of solutions, including addressing the critical issue of supervision.

- Be an ally in the organizational culture change process.

Hamilton community

- Reach out to school boards with ideas and expertise.
- Promote and nurture engaged citizens and civic communities.
- Deconstruct the communal and societal issues that foster a bullying culture.

Ontario Ministry of Education/Ontario government

- Review public education in Ontario. As schools respond to changes in society, or at least attempt to mitigate their negative impact, help them evolve their structures and processes to meet the needs of all learners.

- Shift emphasis to social-emotional learning, including empathy and perspective taking, implemented through an anti-racist, culturally responsive and culturally relevant lens. Offer citizenship education and 21st century skills.

- Draw on the resources across ministries to better support the healthy growth, development and well-being of all our children and youth.

- Update pre-service education programs to ensure all teachers receive training in child developmental stages and social-emotional learning that is anti-racist, culturally responsive and relevant; training in how trauma affects behaviour and development; and training on forms of power abuse, whether by students, educators, parents, guardians or caregivers, and the forms of protection needed within classrooms and schools.

Government of Canada

- Appoint a national child and youth commissioner.

- Create a national strategy that emphasizes a child's social, emotional and mental well-being is as important for a fulfilled life as their academic achievement.

7. Appendices

Appendix A: Biographies

Expert panel

Barry Finlay has over 40 years' experience in public education. Formerly the Director of Special Education for the Province of Ontario, he was responsible for the Ministry of Education's contribution to the Province of Ontario's Mental Health Strategy in conjunction with multiple inter-ministerial partners. Prior to joining the Ministry of Education, Barry served in multiple roles in public education, ranging from Special Education teacher to Associate Director of Education in a public school board. Barry has consulted broadly on the transformation of public education. He has championed the development of mentally healthy learning environments for all students.

Dr. Debra J. Pepler is a Distinguished Research Professor of Psychology at York University. For 35 years, she has led research on aggression, bullying and victimization among children and adolescents. She recently participated on the Respect and Culture Committee in conducting a systemic review at St. Michael's College School. Dr. Pepler co-founded and co-led a federally funded national network, PREVNet (Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence Network) to promote healthy relationships and prevent bullying (www.prevnet.ca). Her research has informed practice and policy related to children and youths' relationships and violence prevention. She served as a Senior Research Fellow at the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre and is currently working to support Canada's participation in the Global Initiative to End Violence Against Children.

Dr. Kathy Short is a Clinical Child Psychologist with research and practice interests in school mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention services. She is the Executive Director for School Mental Health Ontario, a provincial team that helps school boards support student mental health using evidence-based approaches. She was a member of the Mental Health and Addictions Leadership Advisory Council for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and chaired the Mental Health Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention Work Group for the Council. Dr. Short led the Knowledge Translation and Exchange Team for the [School-Based Mental Health and Substance Abuse Consortium](#) (Mental Health Commission of Canada), and is currently working with several partners to create a cross-provincial knowledge hub in school mental health.

Dr. Tracy Vaillancourt is a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in School-Based Mental Health and Violence Prevention at the University of Ottawa where she is cross-appointed as a full professor in Counselling Psychology, Faculty of Education and the School of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences. She is also an elected member of The College of the Royal Society of Canada. Dr. Vaillancourt's research examines the links between bullying and mental health, with a particular focus on social neuroscience. She is currently funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada, and the National Institute of Mental Health. She is the director of the Brain and Behaviour Laboratory at uOttawa.

KOJO Institute is a leading consultancy that partners with organizations to unlock their potential by navigating the challenges connected to equity, bias, diversity, inclusion, anti-oppression and anti-racism ([Kojoinstitute.com](#)).

Kike Ojo-Thompson is the founder and principal consultant of KOJO Institute. An award-winning expert on equity, inclusion and diversity, she specializes in developing, facilitating and implementing innovative solutions for creating equity at an institutional level. She has over 20 years of experience leading engaging and effective workshops, lectures, mediations, and training for a broad range of organizations eager to create equitable outcomes for their staff and clients. Ojo-Thompson is a member of the Ontario Human Rights Community Advisory Committee and was the senior facilitator for the province's carding review team and the project lead for One Vision One Voice, a first-of-its-kind initiative tasked with addressing anti-Black racism in the child welfare system. She is an alternative dispute resolution mediator, certified by the University of Windsor, and has taught history and social sciences at the secondary level in Ontario.

Evelyn Myrie is an anti-racism trainer, coach, keynote speaker and a committed, results-driven professional with a breadth of leadership experience in both the public and not-for-profit sectors. She is a former Regional Director at Status of Women Canada, and Executive Director of the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion – an agency with a mission to advance equity and inclusion practices, policies and behaviors across Hamilton, Ontario. Evelyn also served as the Director of Peel Newcomer Strategy Group where she led the creation of the region's first immigration planning table and the development of the immigrant settlement plan for Peel. With over 20 years' experience in the areas of anti-racism, equity and inclusion, Evelyn continues to work towards creating equitable cultures and outcomes.

Appendix B: Consultation sessions

School Board-Related Sessions	Date	Location
HWDSB Senior Executive Team/Council	Feb 18, 2020	Education Centre
Trustees	Feb 27, 2020	Education Centre
Advisory Committee Chairs	Sep 1, 2020	Online
Hamilton-Wentworth Principals Council/PASS Executive Team	Sep 16, 2020	Online
Union Leaders	Sep 16, 2020	Online
Senior HWDSB Team	Sep 22, 2020	Online
All Staff	Sep 30, 2020	Online
Principals and Vice-Principals	Oct 1, 2020	Online
Student Senate	Nov 11, 2020	Online

Community-Based Sessions	Date	Location
General Session 1	Feb 12, 2020	Westmount Recreation Centre
Students with Special Education Needs, their Families and Community	Feb 15, 2020	Hamilton Public Library
Black Community	Feb 18, 2020	Hamilton Public Library
General Session 2	Feb 19, 2020	Westdale High School
Jewish Community	Feb 20, 2020	Hamilton Jewish Federation
Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ Community	Feb 24, 2020	YWCA Hamilton
Muslim Community	Mar 2, 2020	Islamic School of Hamilton
General Session 3	Mar 5, 2020	Bernie Custis Secondary School
Alternative Education Community	Mar 7, 2020	Good Shepherd Centre
General Session 4	Mar 9, 2020	Saltfleet High School
Indigenous Community	Mar 11, 2020	Hamilton Regional Indian Centre
School Board Partners	Mar 12, 2020	Dream Centre
Newcomer Community	Mar 12, 2020	Sherwood Public Library
General Session 5	Sep 22, 2020	Online (Waterdown)
Racialized Community	Sep 29, 2020	Online
Two-Spirit and LGBTQIA+ Community	Oct 14, 2020	Online
Indigenous Community	Oct 15, 2020	Online

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