



Equity and Inclusivity in Education

Board Received:

May 31, 2021

Review Date:

June 2025

Accountability

1. Frequency of Reports – as needed
2. Criteria for Success – consistent and fair practice in our schools
– diverse communities feel comfortable included and supported within Grand Erie

Policy Statement

The Grand Erie District School Board promotes the principles of equity and inclusivity in education, free of discriminatory biases and barrier-free. The Board values diversity within our school communities.

The Board recognizes that equity of access to the full range of programs, services, and resources is critical to the achievement of successful educational and social outcomes for those served by the school system. Grand Erie is committed to listening, responding and engaging with communities to ensure all voices feel heard and a part of the process. To that end, Grand Erie will implement strategies in accordance with the Ontario Education Equity Action Plan to ensure a culturally responsive environment and a culturally safe space to work and learn.

Definitions:

Diversity – Diversity refers to the presence of a wide range of social characteristics within a group, organization or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, race, colour, culture, creed, gender, sexual orientation, age, ancestry, gender identity, disability, citizenship, family status, marital status, gender expression, sex, place of origin, socioeconomic circumstance and ethnicity.

Equity – Equity refers to a condition of fair, inclusive and respectful treatment of all people. Equity is a process, through cultural humility, to work to eliminate disproportionality and disparity. Equity is achieved when imbalances, barriers and gaps between different groups are removed. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.

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

Note: For additional definitions, see Appendix A.

Equity and Inclusivity in Education Implementation Strategy:

The Board has identified nine areas of focus which serve to honour diversity and commit to the principles of equity and inclusive education.

1. Programs, Guidelines and Practices

Programs, guidelines and practices of the Board will serve students, staff and families in diverse communities by incorporating culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, in addition to the principles of equity and inclusivity in education into all aspects of its operations, structures, policies, programs, procedures, guidelines, and practices, consistent with the principles of the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, to ensure culturally safe spaces for students, families and staff

2. Shared and Committed Leadership

The Board will foster development of leaders who demonstrate commitment to equity and inclusivity and will encourage employees who self-identify as members of disempowered communities in leadership opportunities. Interviews for school administrative positions always include scenarios involving issues of equity and inclusion. Also, the revised Ontario Leadership Framework – used to evaluate administrators – will include an equity domain.

3. School Community Relationships

The Board will establish and maintain a collaborative relationship with diverse communities so that the perspectives and experiences of all students, families, and employees are valued and reflected in our practice.

4. Inclusivity in Curriculum and Assessment Practices

The Board will implement curricula in a culturally responsive and inclusive manner and will review resources, instruction, and assessment and evaluation practices in order to identify, and raise awareness of, discriminatory biases so that each student may maximize their learning potential.

The Board will ensure that resources and instructional practices are respectful of the protected grounds of the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

5. Religious Accommodation

The Board acknowledges each individual's right to follow, or not to follow, religious beliefs (or creeds) and practices free from discriminatory or harassing behaviour and is committed to taking all reasonable steps to provide religious accommodations to staff and students to ensure a culturally safe space for all.

The Board is committed to ensuring that appropriate religious accommodations are developed collaboratively in an environment founded in trust and mutual respect.

Religious accommodations could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. Religious Holy Days and celebrations
- b. Opening and closing exercises
- c. Prayer
- d. Dietary requirements
- e. Fasting
- f. Religious attire
- g. Participation in daily activities and curriculum*
- h. Scheduling for religious/bereavement leaves
- i. Recruitment, job applications, and succession planning

- * Parents may exempt their child from strand D of the Ontario Curriculum: Health and Physical Education, Grades 1-8, 2019. Grand Erie Procedure SO110 – Exemption to Human Development and Sexual Health describes the process for this curriculum exemption.

6. **School Climate and the Prevention of Discrimination and Harassment**

The Board is committed to the principle that every person within a school community is entitled to a respectful, culturally safe and positive school climate and learning environment free from all forms of discrimination and harassment. The Board will ensure that revisions to school codes of conduct and possible barriers to success at the individual, school, or system level include active consultation with diverse communities, and that school codes of conduct are reviewed annually in addition to school census data and school climate data to inform targeted strategies

7. **Professional Learning**

The Board provides administrators, staff, students and other members of the school community including families and those who support families - with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviour needed to identify, and raise awareness of, racism, anti-racism discriminatory biases and systemic barriers. The Board supports professional development in the area of anti-racism, social justice, equity and Indigenous education in an effort to dismantle systemic barriers. The Board supports both staff and students in their own efforts to promote anti-racism, equity, social justice, Indigenous education and anti-discrimination in schools and classrooms.

8. **Accountability and Transparency**

The Board assesses, monitors and reports the progress in implementing the principles of equity and inclusion into all Board policies, programs, guidelines and practices, and communicates these results to the community. The Board ensures that the principles of anti-racism, cultural safety, equity and inclusive education are embedded in school improvement plans, with particular emphasis on identifying and removing barriers to student achievement.

9. **Communication and Outreach**

This policy, and all related policies and procedures, will be communicated to parents/guardians, students, staff, and community members by all means possible, including, but not limited to, school newsletters, newspapers articles, staff meetings, school announcements, system announcements and school agendas.

All Grand Erie employees will be provided with information outlining policies and procedures related to Equity and Inclusive Education, in addition to training opportunities as they arise.

Legislative and Policy Framework

- *The Accepting Schools Act (2012)*
- *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario (2014)*
- *Ontario Education Equity Action Plan (2017)*
- *Building a Foundation for Change: Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy 2019-22*

APPENDIX A

Anti-racism refers to policies and practices of opposing racism through practices of identifying, challenging, and changing the values, structures and behaviours that perpetuate systemic racism and promoting cultural safety

Bias is a tendency to affiliate with one side, showing a preference or choice. **Unconscious biases**, also known as implicit biases, are negative associations that people unknowingly hold. They are expressed automatically, without conscious awareness, and individuals may not notice that they exist. Notably, implicit biases have been shown to trump individuals' stated commitments to equality and fairness, thereby producing behaviour that diverges from the explicit attitudes that many people profess.

Cultural awareness is the recognition that differences and similarities exist between cultures.

Cultural competency refers to an approach that focusses on attaining skills, knowledge and attitudes to work in more effective and respectful ways with persons of different cultures.

Cultural humility is a lifelong journey of self-reflection and learning that involves listening without judgement and being open to learning from and about others. It involves learning about our own culture and our biases. Cultural humility is a building block for cultural safety. It is an overarching principle that is threaded through our learning and acts as the process by which change can occur.

Culturally responsive curriculum accurately reflects and uses the variety of knowledge of all peoples as the basis for instruction; that acknowledges and respects the diverse social backgrounds, identities and experiences of all students, and places them at the centre of the learning environment. The curriculum provides opportunities for students to understand the similarities, differences and connections between people of diverse communities. The curriculum helps students to acquire the skills and knowledge that enable them to challenge unjust practices and to build positive human relationships among their peers and among all members of society.

Culturally responsive pedagogy refers to teaching that recognizes that all students learn differently and that these differences might be connected to background, language, family structure and social or cultural identity, including gender and sexual identities in all their forms

Cultural safety results when all people feel respected and safe when they interact with the education system. Culturally safe spaces are free of racism and discrimination. People are supported to draw strength from their identity, culture and community. People in culturally safe spaces are self-reflective and aware of their positions of power and the impacts of power in relation to their roles with students, families and staff. "Safety" is defined by those who receive the service, not those who provide it.

Cultural sensitivity refers to an attitude that recognizes the differences between cultures and that these differences are important to acknowledge.

Culture provides a history that describes who a collective is and, for each person, it reflects their own unique form of identity. It consists of the beliefs, behaviours, objects and other characteristics common to the members of a particular group or society. Thus, culture includes many societal aspects, including language, customs, values, norms, mores, rules, tools, technologies, products, organizations and institutions.

Discrimination occurs when our prejudices are acted out, resulting in some form of negative treatment of disliked groups and their members or preferential treatment for one's own reference group. Discrimination, unlike prejudice, is more than an attitude or feeling; it is an action and intimately connected to a misuse of power.

Heteronormativity is the belief that heterosexuality is the default, preferred or normal mode of sexual orientation. It assumed the gender binary that there are only two distinct and opposite genders.

Intersectionality refers to the interconnected nature of social identities, such as race, class and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping systems of discrimination or disadvantage

Marginalized refers to a person or group that is treated as insignificant or peripheral.

Microaggression refers to a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudices attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority).

Oppression refers to how one group is dominated by another more powerful individual or group through physical, psychological, social, or economic threats or force.

Prejudice is a preconceived opinion, thought or feeling which is held despite the availability of contrary information and without any valid proof or supporting evidence.

Privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups to which they belong, rather than because of anything they've done or failed to do. White Privilege refers to inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by inequity and injustice.

Racism refers to prejudice, discrimination or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized. It is the belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities or qualities, especially so as to distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another.

Stereotypes are preconceived notions about groups of people. They often include strong tendencies to over-generalize about individuals solely on the basis of their membership in particular racial, ethnic, or religious groups, and an unwillingness to consider new information which might lead to alterations or revisions in one's opinions.

Cultural stereotyping causes us to overlook individual characteristics which do not match our preconceived ideas. We must be ready to revise and change these generalizations when dealing with individuals from a particular cultural group, as we gain more information about them. Keeping standardized pictures of people from other cultures will lead us to over-simplified opinions, attitudes or judgements. The pictures may be based upon real cultural differences, however, many individuals from these cultures may not fit these standard generalizations. Making assumptions can interfere with communications and prevent us from knowing the real person, who is unique as a human being.

Systemic barriers arise out of apparently neutral institutions, policies or practices, and are reinforced by institutional structures and power dynamics, and result in the differential and unequal treatment of members of certain groups.

Values are the core of one's beliefs and are manifested in all behaviours. Everyone has biases and prejudices based upon their values.

White Supremacy refers to beliefs, ideas and practices that promote the superiority of lighter skinned or white human races over other racial groups.

Xenophobia is the fear or hatred of foreigners, people from different cultures, or strangers.

Note: Definitions related to equity and inclusivity are constantly evolving; these reflect current thinking.