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Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Procedures for Policy Development and Implementation, Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119 “*Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools*” identify eight areas of focus for implementing equity and inclusive education.

In accordance with the above policy documents, applicable legislation that outlines the denominational rights of the Catholic school system and with adherence to the *Guiding Principles of the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, and consistent with the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, each area of focus will serve to guide the actions of the Board and its schools, in honouring its commitments to equity and inclusive education policy development, implementation, monitoring and reporting.

1. BOARD POLICIES, PROGRAMS, PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES

The Board recognizes the importance of antiracism and anti-harassment policies in promoting and maintaining a Catholic educational and working environment which fosters racial and ethno-cultural understanding.

The Board will ensure that its policy review cycle will result in the alignment and integration of the requirements of Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119 and the *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* with all Board policies, programs, procedures, and practices. The perspectives of the entire diverse Catholic school community will be reflected in all areas of the teaching, learning and administrative culture. Every effort will be made to identify and remove discriminatory biases and systemic barriers that may limit access to and opportunity for effective employment procedures for individuals from diverse communities and underrepresented peoples within the context of the denominational rights of Catholic school boards.

The Board is committed to serving staff, students, and families in its diverse Catholic community by incorporating the principles of equity and inclusive education into all aspects of its policies, programs, procedures, and practices that are consistent with Catholic denominational rights.

The Board is committed to:

- Establishing the foundational framework that will inform its review and/or development and implementation of a comprehensive equity and inclusive education policy that recognizes and eliminates biases related to race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, family status, religion and linguistic differences as well as socio-economic factors.
- Reviewing existing equity and inclusive education policies and/or extend or develop such policies to fulfill the requirements of existing regulations, the *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119, and the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, in accordance with the denominational rights afforded to the Catholic school system.
- Ensuring that principles of equity and inclusive education permeate and are explicitly stated in all Board policies, programs, Procedures, operations, practices, and Board improvement plans.
- Ensuring all future policies, Procedures and practices are drafted and implemented in accordance with the Board's Equity and Inclusive Education Policy.

- Collecting information needed to monitor the effects of the implementation of the Equity and Inclusion Education policy by the Board.
- Ensuring all persons with disabilities are accommodated appropriately and in a manner consistent with the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.
- Providing training for school and system leaders to facilitate equitable recruitment and hiring to reflect Ontario's diverse society.
- Providing opportunities for the diverse school community, including students, staff, parents, trustees and community members, to provide active input into Board policies and improvement plans on an ongoing basis.
- Ensuring that staff will investigate in a thorough and timely manner any claims of discrimination and/or racism and take appropriate action consistent with the principles of the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

Staff will be committed to:

- Reviewing existing school policies, for example, codes of conduct, to determine that they reflect the principles of equity and inclusive education.
- Extending, developing, and implementing strategies to actively engage students, parents, families, and the wider community in the review, development, and implementation of initiatives to support and promote equity and inclusive education.
- Implementing Board equity and inclusive education policies, programs and school improvement plans consistent with the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and that reflect the needs of their diverse Catholic school community.

2. SHARED AND COMMITTED LEADERSHIP

The Board subscribes to an informed leadership philosophy that inspires, empowers, and supports all stakeholders in our Catholic community to join together to implement institutional practices and behaviours that cultivate equity and inclusion.

The Board is committed to providing informed shared leadership to improve student achievement and to close achievement gaps for students by identifying, addressing, and removing all barriers and forms of discrimination.

The Board recognizes the critical connection between student leadership and improved student achievement and will strive to include the student voice in all aspects of the implementation of equity and inclusive education.

In accordance with the Ministry's *Ontario Leadership Strategy*, effective Board and school leaders will encourage and promote a collaborative approach to all dimensions of equity and inclusive education, which ensures the participation of students, parents, parishes, unions, colleges and universities, service organizations and other community partners.

The Board is committed to establishing and maintaining partnerships with all members of our diverse Catholic community so that the perspectives and experiences of all students are recognized and their needs are met.

The Board is committed to:

- Sharing in the life and mission of the Church by developing a system plan to build and sustain Board and staff capacity in the areas of equity and inclusive education in curriculum and instruction, human resources and governance.
- Identifying and appointing a contact person to liaise with the Ministry and other Boards to share challenges, promising practices and resources.
 - Providing extensive and ongoing education and training for students, staff and trustees in implementing equity and inclusive education and leadership initiatives.

- Establishing selection criteria for leadership positions that prioritize demonstrated commitment, knowledge and skills related to equity and inclusive education implementation and inclusive leadership, and consistent with proactive *Ontario Human Rights Code* compliance.
- Providing ongoing training for all staff that reflects comprehensive attention to the principles of human rights and their fundamental role in an equitable and inclusive environment.
- Striving to ensure that members of communities that are underserved and /or marginalized are included in the shared leadership.

Staff will be committed to:

- Establishing a collaborative culture where the collective capabilities and voices of all stakeholders are used to develop and implement equity and inclusive education goals.
- Promoting equity minded student leadership related to issues of social justice.
- Developing initiatives with student facilitators representing diverse voices and experiences.
- Demonstrating leadership in setting the tone for the positive and proactive implementation of the *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* within the school.

3. SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

The Board recognizes that the effective review, development, implementation and monitoring of equity and inclusive education policies and practices requires the involvement of all members of the entire Catholic school community. The Board further recognizes the importance of engaging specialized expertise in developing and implementing its equity and inclusive education policy.

The Board will seek collaboration with and active engagement from students, parents, staff and other Catholic community partners to create and sustain a positive school climate reflective of Catholic values that supports student achievement.

The Board will identify, examine, and remove any barriers that exist, that are part of systemic discrimination under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, and that prevent full participatory school-community relations.

The Board is committed to establishing and maintaining partnerships with all members of our diverse Catholic community so that the perspectives and experiences of all students, families, and employees are recognized.

The Board is committed to:

- Developing a database of information that establishes the diversity of communities based on self-identification.
- Reviewing and/or initiating tools to determine stakeholders' views on school environment and act upon relevant next steps.
- Taking proactive steps to ensure that existing committees represent the diversity of the wider community.
- Reviewing and deepening existing community partnerships to ensure that they reflect the principles of equity and inclusive education.
- Expanding community efforts to foster new partnerships that engage a cross-section of diverse students, parents, staff, community members and various community organizations to ensure inclusion.
- Establishing processes to identify and address systemic barriers that limit or prevent all sectors of the school community from benefiting from enhanced opportunities for Board representation and greater access to Board initiatives.
- Identifying under-represented communities and facilitating their participation and involvement in Board activities.
- Gathering and using the knowledge, skills, and experience of Board community partners to enrich the total educational and career experiences of staff, students, and volunteers.

Staff will be committed to:

- Implementing strategies to review existing community partnerships to ensure that they reflect the diversity of the broader community.
- Inviting and supporting representation of diverse groups on school committees, including school improvement planning.
- Engaging stakeholders in community forums to listen and address concerns and suggestions.
- Reflecting the approaches described above in their outreach to the broader community.

4. INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

The Board is committed to implementing an inclusive curriculum based on Catholic values and to reviewing resources, instruction, and assessment and evaluation practices in order to identify and address discriminatory biases so that each student may maximize her or his learning potential.

Both in its content and methodology, inclusive curriculum seeks to recognize our commitment to Catholic values and to affirm the life experiences of all students, regardless of race and ethnicity, gender, place of origin, religion, cultural and linguistic background, social and economic status, sexual orientation, age, and ability/disability.

The Board is committed to:

- Ensuring that staff will review student assessment and evaluation policies and practices to identify and address systemic bias that may exist in the way students' work is assessed and evaluated in order to reduce the achievement gap. The principles of such a review will be consistent with the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.
- Supporting the schools' review of classroom strategies that promote school-wide equity and inclusive education policies and practices specifically addressing areas of discrimination (e.g., race, gender, disability).

Staff will be committed to:

- Reviewing student assessment and evaluation policies and practices to identify and address systemic bias that may exist in the way students' work is assessed and evaluated; the principles of such a review will be consistent with the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.
- Supporting the schools' review of classroom strategies that promote school-wide equity and inclusive education policies and practices.
- Making certain that resources and instructional strategies are in accordance with Catholic teachings and values and the *Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations*; are in compliance with the provisions of the *Code* with respect to the prohibited grounds of discrimination; show people of different races, genders, and ages in non-stereotypical settings, occupations, and activities; explore the roles and contributions of all peoples in Canada, and the factors that shaped these roles; encourage open discussion of the prohibited grounds of discrimination under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* (e.g., race, gender, disability) in society, the community, and the school.

5. RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

Committed to the mission of the Church, the Board provides a learning and working environment in which all individuals are treated with respect and dignity regardless of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, record of offences, marital status, family status or disability, in accordance with the *Ontario Human Rights Code* and Ministry Policy/Program Memorandum No. 108.

Within the framework of gospel values, traditions, and the Board's denominational rights, in recognition of this diversity, the Board will attempt to provide reasonable accommodation for students' and staffs' religious beliefs and practices, while also protecting its denominational rights.

The Board is committed to the values of freedom of religion and freedom from discriminatory or harassing behaviour based on religion and will take all reasonable steps to provide religious accommodations within the legal rights afforded to the Catholic school system.

The Board is committed to:

- Consulting with a variety of individuals and groups who represent the religious diversity of the Board in the development/review and implementation of this accommodation.
- Informing students and their parents/guardians and staff of their right to request accommodation for religious beliefs and practices.
- Providing a religious accommodation guideline in keeping with the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, and consistent with its denominational rights, which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of creed, and other *Ontario Human Rights Code* protected grounds, and provides a duty to accommodate.
- Providing religious accommodation for students and staff, where reasonable and consistent with the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

Staff will be committed to:

- Revising/Implementing religious accommodation practices to align with the Board's religious accommodation guideline.

6. SCHOOL CLIMATE AND THE PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

The Board recognizes that a safe and welcoming environment is most conducive to learning. The Board will therefore seek to foster a Christ-centred, positive school climate, free from discriminatory or harassing behaviour. The Board acknowledges that a Christ-centered, positive school climate is one where all members of the school community feel safe, welcomed, and accepted. The principles of equity and inclusive education support positive student behaviour.

The principles of equity and inclusion are consistent with Catholic doctrine and must be considered and applied in employing progressive disciplinary measures, particularly when it is necessary to take into account mitigating and other factors.

The Board is committed to the principle that every person within the school community is entitled to a respectful, positive and Christ-centred school climate and learning environment, free from all forms of discrimination and harassment.

The Board is committed to:

- Ensuring that strategies are in place to identify and remove discriminatory barriers that limit engagement by students, parents, and the community, so that diverse groups and the broader community have better Board-level representation and greater access to Board initiatives.
- Ensuring that procedures are in place that will enable students and staff to report incidents of discrimination and harassment safely and that will also enable staff/the Board to respond in a timely manner.
- Ensuring that, in an effort to alleviate the negative impact of suspensions and exclusions on students, proactive programs will be initiated or expanded to decrease the number of suspensions and expulsions.
- Ensuring that a climate in which excellence is continually strived for and respect for all permeates the environment.
- Ensuring that administrators use progressive discipline and professional discretion, and to understand the duty to accommodate students with disabilities.

Staff will be committed to:

- Ensuring that codes of conduct are revised to address all forms of racism, discrimination, and harassment.
- Ensuring the use of progressive discipline.
- Welcoming, respecting and validating the contributions of all students, parents, and other members of the school community.
- Ensuring that every student is supported and is inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning.
- Ensuring that school codes of conduct reflect the needs of the diverse Catholic community served by the school and are developed with the active consultation and involvement of students, staff, parents, and community members.
- Reviewing or developing guidelines and procedures to address the prohibited grounds of discrimination under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* as they may apply to students, staff, and others in the Catholic community.
- Ensuring that the established Board procedure will enable students and staff to report incidents of harassment and discrimination safely and to have confidence that they will receive a timely and appropriate response.
- Ensuring that all information about the new or revised procedures involving equity and inclusive education is communicated to all students, staff, families, and others in the school community.

7. PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The staff of the Board is its most important asset and is the vehicle by which Catholicity and equity are taught in the classroom and throughout the system. The Board, therefore, recognizes the importance of ongoing professional learning to create a foundation for Catholic values, ecclesial and cultural identity, human rights education and effective teaching practices.

The Board is committed to providing the school community, including students, with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviours needed to identify and eliminate discriminatory biases and systemic barriers under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

The Board is committed to:

- Supporting the schools' review of classroom strategies that promote school-wide equity and inclusive education policies and practices.
- Allocating adequate resources to provide ongoing opportunities for students, administrators, teachers, support staff, and trustees to participate in equity and inclusive education training and leadership initiatives.
- Providing antiracism and antidiscrimination training that examines power and privilege, including training in prevention and early intervention strategies.
- Ensuring that training includes information on cross-cultural differences, and promotes a deeper understanding of exceptionalities and of how to mitigate discipline, in light of its effect on students with disabilities.
- Providing ongoing opportunities for staff, as well as trustees, to participate in equity and inclusive education training and leadership initiatives.
- Ensuring that the principles of equity and inclusive education are modelled and incorporated in professional learning programs.
- Identifying a Board equity and inclusive education contact to liaise with the Ministry of Education and other Boards in order to share challenges, promising practices, and resources.

Staff will be committed to:

- Reviewing classroom strategies and revising them as needed to help ensure that they are aligned with and reflect school-wide equity and inclusive education policies.
- Promoting collaborative teams that learn together, implement their learning and reflect together on best practices.
- Building staff capacity through ongoing needs based professional learning determined through data analysis and based on results.
- Encouraging and supporting students in their efforts to promote social justice, equity, antiracism, and antidiscrimination in schools and classrooms.
- Developing Equity initiatives and providing timely and specific feedback that will further school-wide equitable practices.

8. ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

The Board acknowledges and assumes the responsibility for its policies, actions, and decisions. In the pursuit of greater transparency and accountability, the Board, in respectful collaboration and communication with the whole Catholic school community, will report on its goals and progress in the areas of policy review, school improvement planning and the implementation of the *Strategy*.

The Board is committed to assessing and monitoring its progress in implementing the *Strategy*; to embedding the principles of Equity and Inclusive Education into all Board policies, programs, Procedures and practices; and to communicating these results to the community.

The Board is committed to:

- Embedding the principles of equity and inclusive education into all Board policies, programs, Procedures, and practices.
- Actively communicating the equity and inclusive education policy to students, teachers, parents, staff, school councils, community partners, and volunteers and post it on the Board’s website.
- Seeking and using feedback to improve the Equity and Inclusive Education Policy, in the spirit of continuous improvement.
- Engaging Board and school teams in school improvement planning with particular emphasis on using data to identify and remove barriers to student achievement, to raise awareness about discriminatory practices and to encourage conversations and collaborative actions about racism and other equity issues.
- Establishing processes to monitor progress and assess effectiveness of policies, programs, and procedures.
- Reporting on the progress of implementation of the *Strategy* and its impact on student achievement using specific criteria.
- Ensuring the transparency of the Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process, inform, and support parents through this process.

Staff will be committed to:

- Reporting student achievement data annually to the Board and intervene to ensure the achievement and success of all students.
- Developing and communicating evidence based school improvement plans that are aligned with the *Strategy*.
- Reviewing and establishing self-reflection and self-assessment tools to determine the effectiveness of the school’s equity and inclusive education plans and procedures.

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