



EQUITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICY

ADMINISTRATIVE OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

Adopted Date: June 15, 2010

Latest Reviewed/Revised Date: October 27, 2020

DEFINITIONS

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

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

EIGHT AREAS OF FOCUS

There are eight areas of focus that 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,
- 2) Shared and committed leadership,
- 3) School-community relationships,
- 4) Inclusive curriculum and assessment practices,
- 5) Religious accommodation,
- 6) School climate and the prevention of discrimination and harassment,
- 7) Professional learning, and
- 8) Accountability and transparency.

1. BOARD POLICIES, PROGRAMS, PROCEDURES AND PRACTICES

The Board recognizes the importance of antiracism and anti-harassment policies, programs, procedures and practices in promoting and maintaining a Catholic educational and working environment fostering racial and ethno-cultural understanding.

The Board makes every effort to identify and remove discriminatory biases and systemic barriers that may limit the opportunities of individuals from diverse communities for employment, mentoring, retention, promotion and succession planning in all Board and school positions within the context of the denominational rights of Catholic school boards.

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; and treats one another in a Christ-like manner with dignity and respect at all times, regardless of one's age, marital status, family status, disability, race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or gender, gender expression and/or identity, always respecting and upholding the values and teachings of our Catholic faith.
- 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 aligned with the Board cyclical policy review.

- ensuring that principles of equity and inclusive education permeate and are explicitly stated in Board policies, programs, procedures, practices, operations and Board and School Improvement Plans for Student Achievement and Well-Being.
- ensuring that all future policies, programs, procedures and practices are drafted, implemented and reviewed, in accordance with the Board Equity and Inclusive Education Policy.
- collecting information to inform and monitor the effects of the implementation of the Equity and Inclusive Education policy by the Board.
- ensuring that 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 support the diverse communities within the Board's jurisdiction and within the context of the denominational rights of Catholic school boards.
- providing opportunities for the diverse school community, including students, staff, parents/guardians, principals, Catholic School Councils, the Indigenous Education Advisory Committee, the Niagara Catholic Parent Involvement Committee, the Special Education Advisory Committee, trustees, and community members to provide active input into Board policies and Board and School Improvement Plans for Student Achievement and Well-Being 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*.

Catholic Schools are committed to:

- reviewing school policies, programs, procedures, and practices to determine that they reflect Catholic values and the principles of equity and inclusive education.
- extending, developing, and implementing strategies to actively engage students, parents/guardians, families, including visa students and newcomers to Canada, 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, procedures, and practices programs and Board and School Improvement Plans for Student Achievement and Well-Being 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 embrace the principle of shared and committed leadership to implement institutional practices and behaviours that cultivate equity and inclusion.

In accordance with the Ministry's *Ontario Leadership Strategy*, effective Board and school leaders will promote the development of collaborative environments in which participants share a commitment to equity and inclusive education principles and practices. This collaborative approach includes and supports the active engagement of administrators, staff, students, parents/guardians, parishes, unions, colleges and universities, service organizations and other community partners.

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

The Board is committed to:

- establishing and maintaining partnerships with all members of its diverse Catholic community, so that the perspectives and experiences of administrators, staff, students, parents/guardians are recognized and that their needs are met.
- providing informed shared leadership to improve student achievement and well-being and to close achievement gaps for students by identifying, addressing, and removing all barriers and forms of discrimination that impact student achievement, as well as student and staff well-being.
- sharing in the life and mission of the Church and its teachings by developing a system plan to build and sustain Board and staff capacity in the areas of equity and inclusive education in curriculum, assessment, evaluation, and reporting, instruction, human resources services, and governance.
- identifying 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, administrators 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.

Catholic Schools are committed to:

- establishing a collaborative culture where the collective capabilities and voices of all stakeholders in the Catholic community 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 including visa students and newcomers to Canada attending Niagara Catholic schools.
- demonstrating leadership in setting the tone for the positive and proactive implementation of the Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy within the school and Catholic school community.

3. SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

The Board recognizes that the effective review, development, implementation and monitoring of equity and inclusive education policies, programs, procedures and practices requires the involvement of all members of the entire Catholic school community; including students, parents/guardians, principals, teachers, support staff, trustees, Catholic School Councils, the Indigenous Education Advisory Committee, the Niagara Catholic Parent Involvement Committee, the Special Education Advisory Committee and community partners. The Board further acknowledges the importance of engaging specialized expertise in developing and implementing its equity and inclusive education policy.

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 its diverse Catholic community so that the perspectives and experiences of all students, families, and employees are recognized.
- seeking collaboration and active engagement from students, parents/guardians, staff and other Catholic community partners to create and sustain a positive school climate reflective of Catholic values that supports student achievement and well-being.

- 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/guardians, staff, community members and various community organizations to reflect the principles of equity and inclusive education.
- 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.

Catholic Schools are 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 including visa students and newcomers to Canada on school committees, including school improvement planning.
- engaging stakeholders in Catholic 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, evaluation and reporting practices in order to identify and address discriminatory biases so that students are engaged in, and empowered by their learning, supported by Principals and staff, and are welcome in their learning environments.

- Both in its content and methodology, equitable and inclusive curriculum, assessment, evaluation and reporting practices recognize the Board's commitment to Catholic values and affirm the life experiences of all students: by providing authentic, and culturally relevant opportunities to learn about diverse cultures and perspectives; by treating one another in a Christ-like manner with dignity and respect at all times, regardless of one's age, marital status, family status, disability, or race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or gender, gender expression and/or identity always respecting and upholding the values and teachings of our Catholic faith.

The Board is committed to:

- implementing inclusive curriculum and assessment practices based on Catholic values and taking into account the backgrounds and experiences of students including visa students and newcomers to Canada in order to respond to their individual interests, aptitudes and learning needs.
- 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 consistent with the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.
- supporting the schools' review of classroom strategies that promote school-wide equity and inclusive education policies programs, procedures, and practices to inform short and long-term planning to reduce gaps in student achievement and improve student learning.

Catholic Schools are 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*, taking into account the backgrounds and experiences of students including visa students and newcomers to Canada in order to respond to their individual interests, aptitudes and learning needs.
- supporting the schools' review of classroom strategies that promote school-wide equity and inclusive education policies, programs, procedures, and practices to inform short and long-term planning to reduce gaps in student achievement and improve student learning for all students.
- ensuring consistent monitoring of the growth of students on Individual Education Plans and/or English Language Learners to meet the individual needs of students.
- ensuring access and use of assistive technologies for students who require accommodations to support achievement and success.
- using resources and instructional strategies that are in accordance with Catholic teachings and values, the *Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations*; in compliance with the provisions of the *Ontario Human Rights Code* with respect to the prohibited grounds of discrimination; showing people of different races, genders, and ages in non-stereotypical settings, occupations, and activities; exploring the roles and contributions of all peoples in Canada, and the factors shaping these roles; encouraging open discussion of prohibited grounds of discrimination under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* in society, the community, and the school.

5. RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

The Board believes in the dignity of all people and their equality as children of God, and recognizes the importance of freedom of religion and strives to recognize value and honour the many customs, traditions and beliefs that make up the Catholic community.

- Committed to the mission of the Church, the Board provides a Catholic learning and working environment which treats one another in a Christ-like manner with dignity and respect at all times, regardless of one's age, marital status, family status, disability, race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnicity, citizenship, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or gender, gender expression and/or identity, always respecting and upholding the values and teachings of our Catholic faith.

Within the framework of gospel values, Catholic traditions, the denominational rights of the Board, and in recognition of this diversity, the Board will endeavour to provide reasonable accommodation for religious beliefs and practices of staff and students, while 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.
- 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 policy and procedures, ***Religious Accommodation Policy (100.10.1)*** 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*.

Catholic Schools are committed to:

- implementing religious accommodation practices to align with the Board **Religious Accommodation Policy (100.10.1)**

6. SCHOOL CLIMATE AND THE PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

The Board recognizes that a safe, accepting and welcoming Christ-centered learning and working environment free from all forms of discrimination and harassment is most conducive to learning and working, and that every person within the school community is entitled to a respectful, positive school climate and learning environment. The principles of equity and inclusive education support a whole-school approach to foster positive student behaviour, and are consistent with Catholic doctrine and must be considered and applied in employing progressive discipline, particularly when it is necessary to take into account mitigating and other factors.

The Board is committed to:

- ensuring that all information about the new or revised procedures involving equity and inclusive education is communicated to all staff, students, families, and others in the school community.
- ensuring that the Board Code of Conduct reflects the needs of the diverse Catholic community served by the schools and is developed with the active consultation and involvement of students, staff, parents/guardians, Catholic School Councils and community members to address all forms of discrimination, harassment and racism.
- ensuring that procedures are in place that will enable students and staff to report incidents of bullying, discrimination and harassment safely, including those that are motivated by hate, bias, or prejudice, 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 expulsions on students, preventative programs will be initiated or expanded to decrease the number of suspensions and expulsions.
- ensuring that a climate of excellence is continually strived for and respect for all permeates the environment.
- communicating that administrators use progressive discipline, professional discretion, and understand the duty to accommodate students with disabilities.
- administering student voice and school climate surveys to collect data from students, staff, and parents/guardians to inform School Improvement Plans for Student Achievement and Well-Being.
- supporting students who want to establish and lead activities and organizations that promote a safe and inclusive learning environment, the acceptance of respect for others and the creation of a positive school climate in consultation with school principals.

Catholic Schools are committed to:

- ensuring the use of progressive discipline, and other strategies to support students.
- 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 Catholic expectations for learning, and as outlined in Student Success Strategies, *Growing Success* and other applicable legislation.
- reviewing or developing policies 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 procedures 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 in accordance with the Employee Workplace Harassment Policy (201.7) and Employee Workplace Violence Policy (201.11).
- 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 and inclusive education are taught and fostered in the classroom throughout the system. The Board recognizes the importance of ongoing professional learning to create a foundation for Catholic values, ecclesial and cultural identity, human rights education and effective teaching, assessment, evaluation and reporting practices.

The Board is committed to:

- providing administrators, staff, students and other members of the school community 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*.
- supporting the schools' review of classroom strategies that promote school-wide equity and inclusive education policies programs, procedures, 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 Catholic boards in order to share challenges, promising practices, and resources.

Catholic Schools are committed to:

- reviewing classroom strategies and revising them as needed to help ensure that they are aligned with Catholic values and reflect school-wide equity and inclusive education policies, programs, procedures, and practices.
- 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 responsibility for its policies, actions, and decisions through transparency and accountability in respectful collaboration and communication with the whole Catholic school community.

The Board is committed to:

- assessing, monitoring and reporting its progress by ensuring that the principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded into Board policies, programs, procedures and practices.

- actively communicating the *Equity and Inclusive Education Policy* and Administrative Operational Procedures to students, teachers, parents/guardians, staff, Catholic School Councils, community partners, and volunteers and posting 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 schools in school improvement planning with particular emphasis on using data to identify and remove barriers to student achievement and well-being, to raise awareness about discriminatory practices and to encourage conversations and collaborative actions about racism and other equity and inclusive education issues.
- ensuring students, parents/guardians and members of the community are aware of the Voluntary and Confidential Indigenous Students First Nation, Metis and Inuit Self-Identification Policy.
- establishing processes to monitor progress and assess effectiveness of policies, programs, procedures, and practices.
- ensuring parents (and students where appropriate) are actively involved in identification and placement decisions, including those required by the Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC).
- posting the Director of Education’s Annual Report on the Board website to inform the Ministry of Education and local community about the progress the Board has made in meeting its strategic objectives.
- ensuring that Board staff are trained to uphold, and students and parents/guardians are informed about, the protected grounds in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

Catholic Schools are committed to:

- reporting student achievement data annually at all levels, and intervening to ensure the achievement, success and well-being of all students.
- developing and communicating evidence based School Improvement Plans for Student Achievement and Well-Being (SIPSAW) that are aligned with the Board Strategic Directions, System Priorities and the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and Well-Being (BIPSAW).
- reviewing and establishing self-reflection and self-assessment tools for continuous improvement.

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