



EQUITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

POLICY #: F-50

AUTHORITY: 10-169

POLICY STATEMENT

The Northeastern Catholic District School Board (the "Board") recognizes that all people are created equal, in the image of God, each with inimitable characteristics deserving of dignity (Genesis: 1:27). In accordance with the Church's teachings, it is the policy of the Board to provide in all its operations an educational environment which supports and enables diversity within its Catholic community.

The Board recognizes that any form of social or cultural discrimination is incompatible with Catholic moral principles and is in violation of the Ontario Human Rights Code. The Board recognizes that the school system gives pre-eminence to the tenets of the Catholic faith, congruent with the protection afforded in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, the *Constitution Act, 1982* and confirmed in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The Board and its staff are committed to the elimination of discrimination as outlined in Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and the Ontario Ministry of Education (the "Ministry") Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119, in a manner which is consistent with the exercise of the Board's denominational rights under section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* and as recognized at section 19 of the *Ontario Human Rights Code*.

DEFINITIONS

AREAS OF FOCUS:

Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation, Ontario's *Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* and Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119 (2009) "*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 Code, each area of focus will be introduced and anchored by a preamble and the Board's mission statement. This 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

Preamble:

The Board recognizes the importance of antiracism and antiharassment 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 No. 119 and the 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.

POLICY REGULATIONS

Mission Statement:

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.

Action Items:

The Board will:

- 1.1. Review existing equity and inclusive education policies and/or extend or develop such policies to fulfill the requirements of existing regulations, the *Strategy*, Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119, and the *Code*, in accordance with the denominational rights afforded to the Catholic school system.
- 1.2. Ensure that principles of equity and inclusive education permeate and are explicitly stated in all Board policies, programs, guidelines, operations, practices, and Board improvement plans.
- 1.3. Ensure all future policies, guidelines and practices are drafted and implemented in accordance with the Board's equity and inclusive education policy.
- 1.4. Provide training for school and system leaders to facilitate equitable recruitment and hiring to reflect Ontario's diverse society (2011-2012)

Our Schools will:

- 1.5. Review existing school policies, for example, codes of conduct, to determine that they reflect the principles of equity and inclusive education.
- 1.6. Extend, develop, and implement 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.

- 1.7. Implement Board equity and inclusive education policies, programs and school improvement plans consistent with the Code and that reflect the needs of their diverse Catholic school community(2011-2012)

2. SHARED AND COMMITTED LEADERSHIP

Preamble:

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, unions, colleges and universities, service organizations and other community partners.

Mission Statement:

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.

Action Items:

The Board will:

- 2.1 Identify and appoint a contact person to liaise with the Ministry and other Boards to share challenges, promising practices and resources.
- 2.2 Provide extensive and ongoing education and training for students, administrators, teachers (including guidance counsellors), support staff and trustees in implementing equity and inclusive education and leadership initiatives (2011-2012).
- 2.3 Provide 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 (2011-2012).

3. SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Preamble:

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 Code, and that prevent full participatory school-community relations.

Mission Statement

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.

Action Items:

The Board will:

- 3.1. Review and/or initiate tools, for example, school climate surveys, to determine stakeholders' views on school environment and act upon relevant next steps.
- 3.2. Take proactive steps to ensure that existing committees represent the diversity of the wider community.
- 3.3. Review and deepen existing community partnerships to ensure that they reflect the principles of equity and inclusive education.
- 3.4. Establish 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.

Our Schools will:

- 3.5. Implement strategies to review existing community partnerships to ensure that they reflect the diversity of the broader community.
- 3.6. Invite and support representation of diverse groups on school committees, including school improvement planning.

4. INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Preamble:

When we consider inclusive curriculum and assessment practices, we need to consider both the “how” and the “what”. What we bring to students in terms of content is as important as the way it is delivered. We must consider both what is said and what is not said, as it is known that our students learn both the explicit and hidden curricula. 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.

Effective evaluation includes researched best practices that truly reflect the current level of achievement of the student. Multiple opportunities for assessment allow for student learning and accuracy of assessment and instruction.

Students must be represented in the curriculum and heard in the assessment and evaluation. Students' voice is fundamental in the planning for instruction and the accuracy of assessment.

Mission Statement:

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.

Action Items:

The Board will:

- 4.1. 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 Code.
- 4.2. Support 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).

Our Schools will:

- 4.3. 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; the principles of such a review will be consistent with the Code.
- 4.4. Support the schools' review of classroom strategies that promote school-wide equity and inclusive education policies and practices;

5. RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION

Preamble:

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. 119.

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.

Mission Statement:

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.

Action Items:

The Board will:

- 5.1. Inform students and their parents/guardians and staff of their right to request accommodation for religious beliefs and practices.
- 5.2. Prepare a religious accommodation guideline in keeping with the Code, and consistent with its denominational rights, which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of creed, and other Code protected grounds, and provides a duty to accommodate.
- 5.3. Provide religious accommodation for students and staff, where reasonable and consistent with *the Code*.

6. SCHOOL CLIMATE AND THE PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

Preamble:

The Board recognizes that a safe and welcoming environment is most conducive to learning. The Board will therefore seek to foster a Christ-centered, 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.

Mission Statement:

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

The Board will:

- 6.1. Implement strategies 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;
- 6.2. Put procedures in place that will enable students and staff to report incidents of discrimination and harassment safely and that will also enable Boards to respond in a timely manner.

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.

Professional learning increases the knowledge and skills that teachers bring to the craft and science of teaching, and, thus, engages the student with increasing complexity and precision teaching. Perpetual professional learning is the groundwork for positive changes in our schools. Professional learning must include knowledge creation and knowledge sharing (Earl and Katz, 2005) to ensure that all voices are represented and that we recognize that there is no essential knowledge but rather a continued quest towards deeper representation of all with our knowledge base.

Distributed, deep and sustained changes in practice and structures in school are key elements of professional learning and have impact on student learning, engagement and success in a knowledge society (Earl and Katz, 2005). Professional Learning works to engage all learners and strives for student success and includes the following:

- a) Changes in thinking and practices of teachers
- b) Collaborative inquiry at various levels within the school
- c) Pursuit of innovation (Katz, Earl and Jaafar, 2009)

Mission Statement:

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 *Code*.

The Board will:

- 6.3. Support the schools' review of classroom strategies that promote school-wide equity and inclusive education policies and practices.
- 6.4. Provide ongoing opportunities for students, administrators, teachers, support staff, and trustees to participate in equity and inclusive education training and leadership initiatives (2011-2012).
- 6.5. Identify 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.

Our Schools will:

- 6.6. Review classroom strategies and revise them as needed to help ensure that they are aligned with and reflect school-wide equity and inclusive education policies.

7. ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY**Preamble:**

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*.

Mission Statement:

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, guidelines and practices; and to communicating these results to the community.

Action Items:**The Board will:**

- 7.1. Embed the principles of equity and inclusive education into all Board policies, programs, guidelines, and practices.
- 7.2. Actively communicate 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.

- 7.3. Seek and use feedback to improve the Equity and Inclusive Education policy, in the spirit of continuous improvement.
- 7.4. Engage 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.
- 7.5. Establish processes to monitor progress and assess effectiveness of policies, programs, and procedures (2011-2012).
- 7.6. Report on the progress of implementation of The Strategy and its impact on student achievement using specific criteria (2011-2012).
- 7.7. Ensure the transparency of the Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) process, inform, and support parents through this process.

Our Schools will:

- 7.8. Report student achievement data annually to the Board.
- 7.9. Develop and communicate evidence based school improvement plans that are aligned with *The Strategy*.
- 7.10. Review and establish self-reflection and self-assessment tools to determine the effectiveness of the school's equity and inclusive education plans and procedures(2011-2012).