

Anti-racism and **Equity Action Plan**

Year One Update

March 2023



EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Introduction

The Edmonton Public Schools Board of Trustees issued their [Board Statement on Anti-racism and Inclusion](#) on June 4, 2020. In response to this statement, the voices of staff and students and the urgency within the community to address racism and reconciliation, the Division embarked on a multi-year commitment to work intentionally toward anti-racism and equity through continuous action, learning and improvement. Priority 2, Goal 1 of the [2022-26 Division Strategic Plan](#) calls for the Division to work with students, staff, families and communities to update and advance the Division's [Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan](#) each year. The actions outlined in the plan are intended to lead to authentic and meaningful long-term systemic change. This work is in support of Board Policies [HAAB.BP Anti-racism and Equity](#) (June 2021) and [HAA.BP First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education](#), aligns with the Division's Cornerstone Values of Accountability, Collaboration, Equity and Integrity, and reflects the Division's commitment to student success.

Overview

The Division believes that listening to, and learning from, students, staff, families and community is critical to understanding what is important. These voices have helped inform actions initiated in support of anti-racism, reconciliation and equity. Engagement has been and will continue to be important at every stage of the Division's multi-year path to progress. Based on this ongoing feedback, three key areas were prioritized in the initial development of the action plan and in the identification of next steps for each area:

1. Support for schools and enhancing school capacity.
2. A focus on Human Resource practices and the engagement of all staff.
3. The development of a model to support the collection of extended student demographic data.

This report serves as the opportunity to communicate with stakeholders, including the Board of Trustees, an update on actions taken in the 2021–2022 school year and share our next steps. The report has been structured around each of the three key areas of the action plan.



Support for Schools and Enhancing School Capacity

“Things are moving forward; a lot of these conversations weren’t happening even five years ago, so it is important to keep moving forward.”

– Student Participant, Listening Circle spring 2021

Supporting and enhancing school capacity in the areas of anti-racism and equity involves multiple layers of listening, learning, unlearning and relearning. The provision of ongoing professional learning that supports personal growth and professional practice is necessary as we strive to learn more about the students we serve.

The following actions were taken in the 2021–2022 school year in the area of Support for Schools and Enhancing School Capacity:

- **Introduced the Anti-racism Critical Support Team as a resource to schools**
To support school administration in navigating emergent incidents that are reported to be racist or discriminatory, the Anti-racism Critical Support (ARCS) Team was introduced in the fall of 2021. This team was comprised of trained racially and ethnically diverse members who can support conversations with staff, students, families and community members in an effort to work towards resolution of complex situations. They provide cross-disciplinary support to schools and are trained in restorative justice and mediation techniques. For situations needing specialized supports and with consultation from other Division areas (e.g., Division Support Services, Communications, Intercultural Consultants, Specialized Learning Supports school-linked teams) an [ARCS Team Action Plan](#) template was created to be utilized and customized to address the emergent situation and school context. In its first year, the ARCS Team was a valued resource and responded to nine requests from schools.
- **Introduced the multi-faith calendar**
Students, staff, families and community members have shared the importance of the school calendar representing the diversity of Division stakeholders and the days of significance that are important to them. As a result, the Division introduced a [multi-faith calendar](#) for schools to use to support welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy learning and working environments for students, staff and families. The multi-faith calendar is intended to be a planning tool for schools to help minimize conflict of exams, assignments etc. with days of significance for students. Knowing the needs of their communities, school staff can use the calendar as a reference when planning school events, student exams and project deadlines.
- **Supported the work to review [GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar](#)**
Hearing from staff, students, families and members of the community reinforced the importance of having the Division’s yearly operational calendar include a variety of cultural and religious holidays that better reflect the diversity of staff and students. In working towards a more inclusive calendar the Division reviewed feedback gathered by the community around key days of significance, added questions related to the calendar as part of the 2021–2022 Division Feedback Survey and the review of [GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar](#) was identified on the Board of Trustees’ Policy Review Committee’s annual work plan. Administration used this feedback to help inform the preparation of the [2023–2024 calendar report](#), which was brought forward for approval at the June 7, 2022 Board meeting.

- **Provided a range of professional learning sessions for Division staff**

The Division developed and implemented a range of professional learning (PL) sessions throughout the 2021-2022 school year. The sessions were intended to build awareness and help staff weave the values of equity and inclusion into instruction and everyday actions. Feedback from year one participants and from the Anti-Racism and Equity Principal Committee helped to identify areas of PL that would be required to support ongoing progress toward becoming an anti-racist organization. This includes the development of a set of asynchronous resources principals could use with their school community around key areas of anti-racism work. The following is a snapshot of some of the key areas of PL staff have been participating in:



- Allyship and inclusion
- Bias and microaggressions
- Creating a welcoming learning environment through a First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspective
- Foundational definitions and understandings of anti-racism
- Intersectionality
- Project-based learning through a First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspective
- Treaties and agreements with First Nations
- Truth, Reconciliation and Residential schools
- Weaving foundational knowledge through literacy text

Professional Learning was made available to Division staff through a variety of means, including, but not limited to: early dismissal Thursday sessions; Division PL days; consultant support; pre-and post-Division Leadership Meeting sessions; Black History month supports; National Truth and Reconciliation Day supports; school level and catchment initiatives in support of awareness and capacity building, and asynchronous learning resources.

- **Establishment of school level anti-racism and equity teams**

Aligned with the Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan and the sense of urgency within schools to address inequity and racism, a number of schools created an anti-racism and equity team to support this work within the school community. These school level teams were instrumental in promoting school cultures that support belonging and inclusion and reflected the participation of staff and students. As a result of the grassroots interest in this work, it took a range of pathways forward and was supported through the collaborative efforts of central decision units, catchments and schools.



- **Developed a draft Anti-racism and Equity toolkit**

This resource is being developed to support schools in creating an environment of anti-racism that recognizes diversity as a strength and values the diversity across school communities, the Division and the broader community. Fundamentally, it upholds the Division's commitment to developing positive relationships with staff, families and community members and working together in support of student success. Grounded in the Division's strategic direction, the toolkit aligns with Division policy [HAAB.BP Anti-racism and Equity](#) and is a supportive document that can be easily accessed by any Division staff member.

The draft toolkit, scheduled for release in the 2022–2023 school year, will contain information and links to support schools in the areas of anti-racism and culturally responsive practices and sexual orientation and gender identity and expression support. The comprehensive toolkit will provide staff with access to a variety of resources to support anti-racism work, including information on the Division's board policies and administrative regulations, anti-racism learning resources, curricular links and information on the multi-faith calendar. It will also provide schools with clarity around the supports available through the Division's Diversity Team, including a direct link for requesting consultant support and first language supports.

Beyond the toolkit, there are a range of additional resources available to staff related to both of these areas, as well as resources that develop foundational knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures, worldviews, histories and current realities.

Next steps...

- Continue to build capacity at school, catchment and Division levels through professional learning opportunities focused on key areas or themes related to anti-racism, reconciliation and equity.
 - This will include the introduction of processes and resources to support schools in continuing to build confidence and capacity within school communities
- Gather input from staff, students and community members to inform foundational professional learning topics for Division staff.
- Continue to communicate the availability and support of the ARCS Team.
- Explore curricular links and learning opportunities that build connection, support belonging and develop intercultural understanding for students and staff.
- Enhance communication and awareness around current avenues for students and families to report incidents of racism
- Extend the information provided through the multi-faith calendar and continue to build Division staff's awareness of the calendar and how best to use it as a resource.
- The Policy Review Committee continues the work to review and revise [GCA.BP Approval of the School Year Calendar](#). This work will include additional opportunities for engagement.

Human Resource Practices

“My hope is for the courage to continue the conversation below the surface of the cultural iceberg. Conversations that challenge our beliefs and assumptions so that we can bring our whole selves to work.”

– Division Staff Member, Staff Collaborative Conversation December 2021

Edmonton Public Schools serves diverse students, families and staff. It is important that students and families see themselves represented within the Division’s staff. Engagement and collaboration with staff supported key actions taken in support of this area. The Division’s success is both a collective and individual responsibility for all members of the organization.

The following actions were taken in the 2021–2022 school year in the area of Human Resource (HR) Practices:

- **Developed and refined a Diversity and Inclusivity Statement**

Significant work was done to explore and support the crafting of a statement that represents the Division’s beliefs around diversity and inclusion. The statement was created after researching best practices, examining diversity statements for other organizations and gathering feedback from a variety of stakeholder groups. The aim is to ensure existing staff and potential employees feel the statement represents the Division as an inclusive and equitable workplace, an attractive work environment and an employer that embraces diversity. This statement, as highlighted below, was implemented in October 2022 and serves as a reflection of what the Division offers and what it aspires to be.

We are listening, we are learning and we are committed. Edmonton Public Schools aspires to be a learning community where every individual:

- ***Belongs***
- ***Is included***
- ***Experiences success***

We strive to empower staff to reach their goals in a diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace that values their lived experiences. We are seeking individuals like you, who reflect the students and families we serve. Together, we are stronger.

- **Hosted collaborative conversations with staff who identify as Black, Indigenous and People of Colour to learn about their lived experiences**

As part of the Division's ongoing conversations on anti-racism and equity, the Division hosted Staff Collaborative Conversations (SCC) in December 2021. The SCC provided staff the opportunity to share why the Division's work on anti-racism and equity is important and to suggest what the Division's path to progress could look like based on their own lived experience or personal perspectives.

Focus group discussions were held virtually in February 2022 with Black, Indigenous and People of Colour, who are in formal leadership positions or aspiring to leadership positions in the Division. Participants discussed their experiences seeking advancement opportunities and formal leaders shared perspectives of their experiences in leadership roles. Feedback from these discussions was summarized and is being used to inform HR practices that support aspiring leaders.



The feedback from these two engagement opportunities was documented and used to inform changes to HR practices this past year. This feedback will continue to be a source of staff voice in the ongoing work towards becoming an anti-racist organization.

- **Gathered feedback on Division teacher hiring practices to inform change**

Edmonton Public Schools is committed to hiring practices that are welcoming and equitable for all applicants. The Division values diversity and welcomes applications from all qualified individuals.

In January 2022, teachers newly hired within the last three years were invited, through a survey, to provide feedback on their application and interview experience. The information collected helped to inform changes to teacher hiring practices. This process will continue in the future through engagement with other staff groups.

Based on survey feedback, to support more individuals applying from diverse backgrounds, language in the hiring application has been updated to include the opportunity for an applicant to share their lived experience. This work also included reviewing and revising the rubric used for teacher applications through an anti-racist lens.

- **Initiated the development of a new leadership competency, including indicators related to leadership for anti-racism, reconciliation and equity**

The Division's competency-based Leadership Development Framework strives to ensure that staff have a common understanding of what it means to be a leader. The process to explore an anti-racism competency was initiated and will continue to develop with input from various stakeholders.

- **Initiated a review of curriculum for all leadership development cohort based programs**

As the Division moves forward with intentional efforts towards anti-racism and equity, integrating anti-racism content into the Leadership Development Framework and related programs will be a critical step. In year one, additional professional learning was included relative to anti-racism and reconciliation. Existing materials, visuals and graphics were also examined and revised to support this work.

- **Revised the Aspiring Principal Development Program Application Rubric through an anti-racism and equity lens**

The rubric used to evaluate applicants was examined and adjusted to better reflect leading a learning community in which diversity is embraced and a sense of belonging is emphasized to support success for all students. Additionally, the application was revised to include an introductory paragraph that upholds the Division’s Anti-racism and Equity policy.

- **Initiated review of Board Policies and Administrative Regulations through an anti-racist and equity lens**

In support of Board Policy [HAAB.BP Anti-racism and Equity](#), a review was initiated of all Division Board Policies through an anti-racist and equity lens. This work is multi-year work and will also involve the review of administrative regulations. Through the anti-racism and equity work in the area of HR, administrative regulations were examined. The work to revise these documents is ongoing.

- **Developed diversity professional learning for managers working in the area of hiring**

To build their understanding and application of unconscious bias in hiring practices, a professional learning session was developed to support principals and other Division managers. The session was first offered for Division leaders starting in the fall of 2022. In total, the session has been made available three times throughout the 2022–2023 school year.

Next steps...

- Establish a staff working group to help inform and support the Division’s commitment to and progress towards reconciliation and being an anti-racist organization.
- Continue to use the feedback from the leadership and staff collaborative conversations to determine intentional actions that will support more Black, Indigenous and People of Colour to advance their careers in leadership.
- Start exploring the collection of staff and applicant extended demographic data.
- Continue updating administrative regulations to align with Board Policy [HAAB.BP Anti-racism and Equity](#).
- Enhance communication and awareness around current avenues for staff to report incidents of racism.
- Continue to offer and build upon PL for hiring managers.
- Explore developing tools or templates for HR leaders to use that support consistent approaches to hiring through an anti-racist and equity lens.
- Continue review and revision of hiring practices across all staff groups.

Extended Student Demographic Data Collection

“If we know better, we can do better - having these opportunities lets us do better. My hope is there comes a time when nobody is marginalized for any reason.”

– Community Member, Listening Circle May 2021

Student success and well-being is at the heart of the Division’s work—striving to have all students feel safe, experience a sense of belonging at school and to grow and succeed as learners. One action to help the Division further enhance student success in school is to better understand how students identify themselves and then examine which students are thriving in school and which students need additional support.

September 22, 2020, the Board of Trustees [passed a motion](#) formally requesting that Edmonton Public Schools administration develop a model for the collection of data to better understand the self-described identities of students in the Division.

The planning and development process to inform this model was supported by ongoing consultation with staff, students and community organizations, examination of research and learning from other Canadian jurisdictions already collecting additional student demographic data. The result of this work was the implementation of the Extended Student Demographic Data (ESDD) Survey in the fall of 2022 with students in Grades 4 to 12.

The following actions were taken in the 2021–2022 school year toward the development and implementation of a model to support the collection of extended student demographic data:

- **Developed a working group to support the initiative**

In September 2021, a working group focused on developing a model for the collection of ESDD was established. This group was made up of staff from across various central decision units, bringing expertise in the areas of diversity education, First Nations Métis and Inuit education team, technology, student information, communications and research. The working group examined a broad range of factors critical to the initiative, such as:

- What questions around identity should be asked and why will this information be important?
- Should the data be anonymous or linked to student identity?
- How will this additional data inform action that will result in greater success for students?
- What are the Division’s legal responsibilities around the collection and protection of this data (ie. FOIP)?
- How should the data be gathered?
- What supports will schools need to implement the initiative?
- What engagement and communication with stakeholders will be critical to the success of this work?

To support the initiative, a project plan was developed and used to document each step of the process, including references to research, options for consideration, feedback from stakeholders and key decision points.

- **Engaged with staff, students and members of the community**

Honouring the complex nature of this work, the Division engaged multiple perspectives, including hearing from: the Anti-racism and Equity Steering Committee, the Anti-racism and Equity Principal Committee, members of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education and Diversity Teams, senior leadership, Student Senators, students, and community members representing diverse perspectives and the voice of families. These conversations informed the scope and development of student survey questions, determined the approach to having students complete the survey and strategies to support communication and readiness for implementing the survey with students.

- **Developed a set of questions to support additional information about the identity of students across the Division**

Following two years of consultation, research, planning and preparation, Edmonton Public Schools implemented its first student demographic data collection in October 2022. This work included careful consideration regarding what additional information about student identity could help the Division take action towards anti-racism and equity. A commitment was made to not ask questions without a clear understanding of how the resulting data could inform improvement. For this first time gathering additional information around student identity, it was determined that the following small set of questions (with a list of identity choices) would be asked of students in Grades 4 to 12:

- Do you identify as First Nations, Métis and/or Inuit?
- Which of the following best describes you?
- What ethnic or cultural origin(s) do you see yourself as?
- What is your religion and/or spiritual affiliation?
- Please describe your gender identity.
- Please describe your sexual orientation.

(This question was asked of Grades 7 to 12 students only)

These questions were asked of students through an online survey. To respect individual student and family comfort with sharing additional identity information with the Division, parents were able to request that their child not participate in the orientation session and extended student demographic survey. Parents were able to indicate their preference to the school through an email, phone call or conversation with school staff.

Additionally, all questions for students were voluntary, which meant participating students only answered the questions they felt comfortable answering. For each question, students were also able to choose to not answer the question at all or select a response of 'I prefer not to answer.'

- **Developed a variety of resources that supported survey implementation**

Communication was recognized as a critical factor to the success of this initiative. With this in mind, a key component of the model supporting the collection of ESDD included developing materials to support communication with principals, staff, families and students. A range of resources was developed, in consultation with both internal and external stakeholders. Examples of these materials included:

- A video to introduce the student survey and provide key information.
- Materials for principals to work with their staff in preparation of the survey.
- Materials for principals to support further conversations with families prior to the survey being implemented with students.
- Materials for teachers to use with their students to support a pre-survey orientation and materials to support the actual implementation of the survey.

- To support clarity and understanding, student glossaries were developed to help students with language and terminology used in the survey.

To support communicating with as many individuals as possible, key materials were translated into the 15 most common languages represented within the student population. Information regarding the survey was available on SchoolZone, epsb.ca and Connect (internal staff website); additionally, the Superintendent sent a letter out to all families and Division social media accounts were used to reach out to staff, students and families.

Next Steps...

- A small team of Division staff will prepare for the reporting of preliminary results; this is a large data set as approximately 73 per cent of all students registered in Grades 4 to 12 as of September 30, 2022 participated in the survey (or approximately 55,850 students)
- Engage with stakeholders to inform how best to present the data in a manner that respects the identity of students and clearly communicates what students have shared with the Division through the survey.
- Develop a communication plan to support the release of initial results.
- Utilize preliminary results to inform further analysis of the data over subsequent school years looking at areas of safety, sense of belonging and academic outcomes.
- Through an evidence-based approach, use information from this data set to inform actions that will inform system improvement and greater success for all students.
- Take lessons learned through this work to inform the exploration of a model to support the collection of staff extended demographic data.



Supporting the Work

“It’s not so much what you say—it’s what you do. If families don’t see action around what’s being done about eliminating racism—if they don’t see their children being protected then it doesn’t matter what we say. It’s going to be important to demonstrate what’s being done.”

– **Community Member, Summer engagement 2022**

The Division has planned, resourced and organized to support progress in support of the [Anti-racism and Equity Action Plan](#) and Board Policy [HAAB.BP Anti-racism and Equity](#). The steering committee and principal committee meet regularly to ensure that progress in each of the priority areas remains on track, to provide feedback on the work and to plan next steps. The Division also advertised and recruited to support the reestablishment of the Equity Advisory Committee, made up of parents and members of the community. Collectively, from across these three committees, the Division is supported by a diverse range of voices, perspectives and lived experiences. The work of each of these groups is guided by the action plan and supported through a Terms of Reference.



Beyond these formally established groups, this work has been supported and informed by the voices of staff, students and community members through various means of engagement. The interest and time invested by these individuals is a strong indication of the importance of this work and the shared commitment across the Edmonton community towards anti-racism and equity.

Conclusion

The Anti-racism and Equity Action plan is a multi-year approach reflecting the Division’s commitment to reconciliation and becoming an anti-racist organization. The action plan is intended to be responsive and will be updated to reflect actions accomplished and critical next steps on the Division’s path to progress.

It is our hope that actions that have been taken and the future work that is set out in this plan will ultimately support a greater sense of belonging for students, staff and families. This work is a collaborative effort that is built on listening, learning and evidence-based decision-making.

The Division will continue to engage in meaningful ways with students, staff, families and community members to ensure that diverse lived experiences and perspectives inform the work. Ongoing communication regarding the progress of this action plan will support transparency and reinforce the Division’s unwavering commitment to anti-racism, reconciliation and equity.

“The only way society can get to the healing is through knowing.”

– **Unknown, Division meeting spring 2022**