Origins of Equity and Inclusive Education within TCDSB

The Toronto Catholic District School Board addresses the educational needs of over 90,000 students through 168 elementary schools and 31 secondary schools including two combined facilities, one of which is a school for the arts. The administration of education is provided by over 10,000 teachers, academic, administrative, support and supervisory staff with a range of expertise to address the needs of students, educators, parents and stakeholders. This service delivery reflects multiple components that comprise the domain of education and the diversity of populations that are representative of various ethnocultural groups in the City of Toronto and the Canadian mosaic.

The origins of culturally sensitive educational service delivery evolved from the 1980 Archdiocese of Toronto and the Metropolitan Separate School Board’s initiative to address emerging populations in schools, the 1982 results of the Ontario Human Rights Conference on Race Relations, community consultations, and various sub-committee recommendations on policy development. The outcome of these initiatives produced the 1984 Metropolitan Separate School Board Race and Ethnic Relations and Multiculturalism Policy, a precursor to this document that was regarded as a model of equity in education for school boards throughout the country.

The increasing diversity in large urban centres in Ontario prompted the Ministry of Education and Training to review and address the delivery of educational services in light of the increasing multicultural and multiracial compositions in schools, taking into consideration the history and experiences of various Aboriginal peoples. Following the amendment of the Education Act (1992), the Government of Ontario crafted the following document and mandate for all school boards – Changing Perspectives: A Resource Guide for Antiracist and Ethnocultural-Equity Education – All Divisions and OACs (1992); and Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation (1993) which emerged from Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119 as a method of equitable service delivery.

In order to meet the needs of the dynamic, growing and changing demographics within metropolitan Toronto, the Board has utilized ten areas of focus and positioned an inclusive Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity: Policy and Guidelines (1995) in compliance with legislative requirements. This process encompasses the following: Board Policies, Guidelines and Practices; Leadership; School-Community Partnership; Curriculum; Student Languages; Student Evaluation, Assessment and Placement; Guidance and Counseling; Racial and Ethnocultural Harassment; Employment Practices; and Staff Development.

As part of the original mandate, the 1995 document included a five-year implementation plan ranging from system-wide distribution, staff development and integration of the areas of focus into the local action plans to system-wide reviews and modifications to address current realities. By 1997, the Government of Ontario enacted legislation to amalgamate six communities within the Metropolitan Toronto area, namely the Borough of East York and the cities of Toronto, North York, Scarborough, York and Etobicoke through the City of Toronto Act, as part of their fiscal management and accountability initiative. Within the same year, additional legislation reduce the number of school boards within the province through the Fewer School Boards Act and by 1998 seventy-two district school boards, thirty-two school authorities and eight provincial school emerged. Although the Metropolitan Separate School Board has had a history of providing educational services within
the Metropolitan Toronto area, the new entity – the Toronto Catholic District School Board – continued with the same mandate amidst increasing diversity in the demographics of communities, as reflected by students, parents, staff and stakeholders.

The educational period of 1999-2004 saw various challenges faced by the board of education ranging from issues of poverty that affected students and parents to funding of school-based programs. Various community consultations took place and the re-focus initiatives on educational outcomes became a key element for student success. Educational reform continued within the period 2005-2008 whereby the revised Policy/Program 119 emerged as part of Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy which concentrated on three core priorities: (a) High levels of student achievement; (b) Reduced gaps in student achievement; (c) Increased public confidence in publicly funded education. With these priorities were affixed the following areas of focus for development and implementation within the timeframe 2009-2012 in school boards: (a) Board policies, programs, guidelines, and practices; (b) Shared and committed leadership; (c) Inclusive curriculum and assessment practices; (d) School-community relationships; (e) Religious accommodation; (f) School-climate and the prevention of discrimination and harassment; (g) Professional learning; (h) Accountability and transparency.

In conclusion, the TCDSB has initiated various equity programs that reflect the needs of our diverse constituencies. The Board continues to engage in the development of creative and meaningful solutions that represent our global village within the context of Catholic education.