

Administrative Memorandum

Regular Board Meeting

Date: November 17, 2021
Topic: Racial Equity Environmental Assessment in Surrey School District
Submitted by: Dr. Jordan Tinney, Superintendent of Schools/CEO

Background:

Through the spring of 2021, the Surrey School District engaged with an external consulting firm to conduct an assessment of people's lived experiences in the district. The consulting team conducted 39 Listening Circles which included students, educators, support staff, school leaders, district leaders, union representatives, and families (Black, Indigenous, Southeast Asian, White) at all levels. The purpose was to deepen our understanding of Surrey Schools from a diverse perspective of external stakeholders.

The report provided recommendations to the district which are intended to advance racial equity and educational justice (which is to allow all children from all backgrounds to fulfill their potential without barriers).

This report and a subsequent presentation at a Public Meeting of the Board of Education are designed to give a high-level overview of the findings and of the recommendations. The full report will be made public after the Regular Meeting of the Board of Education.

The findings of the report are in three areas, Systemic Change, Workforce Development, and Stakeholder Engagement. Each area also comes with specific recommendations.

Systemic Change

Opportunities:

- Strong commitment to racial equity among Surrey Schools leadership.
- Strong players in Surrey promoting racial equity and educational justice.

Challenges:

- Explicit racism exists.
- Lack of communication by leadership to convey their commitment.
- Lack of coherent strategy for advancing racial equity and monitoring the progress.
- Lack of diversity in leadership team.

Recommendations:

- Establish a racial equity and educational justice policy.
 - Strengthen organizational capacity.
 - Create a district-wide implementation plan on promoting racial equity.
 - Develop school-based plans to eliminate opportunity gaps.
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Workforce Development

Opportunities:

- Staff are student-focused and committed to equity and justice.
- Stakeholders acknowledge the district's progress toward equity and inclusiveness among students with disabilities.
- Staff want to know how to communicate.

Challenges:

- The celebration of Indigenous cultures exists but is largely limited. The treatment and history of Indigenous peoples as a reason for concern.
- Increased representation is critical.
- Lack of safe space to discuss experiences of racism and microaggressions among BIPOC educators, staff, and students.
- Different perspectives on the available resources for teachers between leadership and staff.
- Training efforts not happening at the system level.

Recommendations:

- Adopt anti-racist, culturally responsive and inclusive teaching.
- Strengthen and expand supports for staff and BIPOC to thrive as members of the Surrey Schools family.
- Offer culturally responsive professional development for staff that is mandated, compensated, and co-created.
- Offer professional development on how to partner with families to support student learning.

Stakeholder Engagement

Opportunities:

- Strong desire to work closely with schools and teachers among community stakeholders.
- Students are well supported academically and emotionally.

Challenges:

- Partnership with school is seen as challenging due to cultural difference, language barriers and lack of communication.
- Experiences of language-based inequity is reported by stakeholders, including discrimination or barriers due to English fluency and perceived English fluency, microaggression in the mispronunciation of names and centering white western culture and perspectives.

Recommendations:

- Adopt practices to ensure student, family and school staff informed decision making.
 - Professional development on how to partner with families to support student learning.
 - Strengthen support for family and community engagement.
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Racial Equity Environmental Assessment in Surrey School District

The district is pleased to receive the report and we now look to the important work that lies before us. There are many comments from our community that are difficult to hear because despite our efforts to be inclusive and to respect and honour all cultures and races, the comments show that this is not the lived experiences of all of our children and community members who work and learn within our schools.

To proceed with the report and its recommendations, it's critical that the district also take a collaborative approach. We have reached out to our partners to talk about first steps in digesting the report and the recommendations. The motions before the Board tonight allow the Board to demonstrate its commitment toward this work and to let the processes begin.

Each of the recommendations below are intended to address the top three recommendations under the category of Systemic Change. To establish a policy, to examine how we build capacity and align as a system, and to create and design an effective implementation plan are critical first steps.

This is important and necessary work and we hope that this will be the start of a journey toward equity for all children and members of our school communities.

It is recommended:

THAT the Board of Education direct the Superintendent to establish a policy on racial equity and educational justice; and

THAT the Board of Education direct the Superintendent to establish plans to build capacity district-wide for promoting racial equity in all Surrey Schools and that those plans be considered during the 2022-2023 budget process; and

THAT the Board of Education direct the Superintendent to develop an implementation plan designed to promote racial equity across the Surrey School District based on the recommendations of the Racial Equity Environmental Assessment.
