

Racial Equity in Surrey Schools

Report to the Board of Education

The Sponsor and Purpose

- Engaged with a well-respected firm with experiences in the public education sector and in BC to conduct a process of listening to and engaging with our community.
- Purpose – to help Surrey Schools “make meaningful personal connections to systemic inequality of which they may not have been conscious in order to dismantle it and replace it with newly developed systems that ensure systemic and sustainable racial equity and social justice.”
- Anticipated culminating recommendations in policy, targeted training for senior staff and administration, embedded professional development for staff and long term cultural change toward racial equality.



The Theory of Action

- **Normalize**— Establish educational equity, racial equity and social justice as key values at Surrey Schools by developing a shared understanding and analysis of key concepts across the entire organization and by creating a sense of urgency to make tangible changes happen.
- **Organize**— Build Surrey Schools' leadership, staff and organizational capacity, skills and competencies through specific racial equity adaptive leadership professional development while also building the necessary infrastructure to support and advance racial equity and social justice work. Support internal organizational change teams and external partnerships with other institutions and community.

The Theory of Action

- Operationalize— Apply learned theory and adaptive leadership strategies into tangible action and clear, laser-sharp outcomes by implementing new tools for decision-making, measurement and accountability (Organizational Assessment and Environmental Scanning, Racial Equity Analysis Tool, developing a Surrey Schools Strategic Racial Equity and Social Justice Action Plan).
- Belonging— Utilize Adaptive Leadership for Racial Equity principles organization-wide to sustainably advance systemic racial equity and social justice by supporting and holding each one of the Surrey Schools stakeholders accountable for moving the work forward in an intentional, meaningful and strategic manner. Share with Surrey Schools leadership and staff with consistent assessment/check-in mechanisms in place. Mobilize this crucial work by involving those most impacted with each particular challenge/concern of the work consistently throughout the process. Accountability must come from a deep understanding and analysis of the underlying reasons for the changes being made in regards to racial equity. For every unit of accountability, there must be a unit of support!

The Process

- Ongoing targeted professional development in adaptive leadership and courageous conversations with senior team
- Listening circles – Racing to Equity hosted 39 listening circles, typically having 12 participants – close to 500 participants
- Listening Circles for specific groups included (not limited to):

District Staff	Students	Families
Senior Staff	Black	Indigenous
Persons of Colour	South Asian	Surrey Teachers
CUPE	District Parents Advisory	Principals and Vice-Principals

The Invitation - excerpts

- *A key component of this organizational assessment is the comprehensive analysis of the feedback we would like to gather from each community affected or most impacted by decisions we have made and that we currently make within the district.*
- *As such, we are facilitating a series of Listening Circles for the following populations: students, families, staff, district office staff, educators, members of our school community and the Surrey community in general.*
- *Listening Circles help our school communities gain a shared understanding of collective harms. Our school communities need opportunities to process the personal and collective impact of oppression, marginalization and discrimination. From the effects of systemic racism and pandemics to natural disasters and abuse, we as humans seek courageous and gracious forums in which to express our feelings, acknowledge each other's humanity and truly hear one another to build a better collective WE.*

The resulting report and findings

- Three areas:
 - Systemic change
 - Workforce development
 - Stakeholder engagement

Systemic Change - Findings

- 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

Systemic Change - 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

Detailed examples – Building Capacity

Recommendation 2: Strengthen organizational capacity through the principles of coherence and alignment

- ✓ To strengthen SSD's organizational capacity, utilize the principle of coherence and alignment to advance equity. As noted by stakeholders, current initiatives are fragmented and siloed across schools and departments, and incoherence and misalignment in educational initiatives and programs can lead to negative consequences. When systems are aligned and coherent, it can better advance equity (Walrond and Romer 2021)². The specific recommendations include:
 - developing culturally responsive and inclusive leadership such as by creating a Department of Racial Equity and Academic Excellence (DREAE) which will lead the racial equity and educational justice initiative and creating a senior leader position such as the Director of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion to lead DREAE with adequate staff and financial resources;
 - providing adaptive leadership professional development for central office and school leaders;
 - building partnerships with City/Governmental Agencies and Officials so that the District can be better resourced, supported and equipped to meet the social emotional and academic needs of the children.

Workforce development - Findings

- 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.

Workforce development - 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 - Findings

- 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.

Stakeholder Engagement - 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

Timeline of Activities

- Oct. 27th – Board discussion
- Nov. 3rd – Board follow up
- Nov. 17th – public meeting of the Board
- Nov. 18th – Live Event (community) for listening circle participants and full public release of the Report