



December 7, 2020

Dear Queen Victoria Public School Community:

We are writing with an important update on the external investigation into the anonymous letter sent to a former Queen Victoria Public School (QVPS) administrator in early January 2020. The external investigation team has submitted their initial investigation report to TDSB into who may have authored the anonymous letter and their key findings are described below. In order to protect the privacy of individuals involved in the investigation, we are only able to share general findings at this time.

Background

As you may recall, TDSB Employee Services commenced an internal investigation shortly after the letter was reported to TDSB senior staff in January 2020. TDSB also reported the letter to Toronto Police to possibly investigate as a hate crime. QVPS staff members named in the anonymous letter were informed about the existence of the letter but the letter itself was not shared with the named staff members at that time due to the ongoing TDSB Employee Services and Toronto Police investigations and pending further direction from those investigators. The letter was then posted online on April 21, 2020 by one of the parties to the investigation, with staff names redacted.

As a result of this anonymous letter and its disclosure to the community, a number of individuals expressed concerns for their safety in the work and school environment and raised concerns about alleged anti-Black racism, discrimination and other issues at the school. A large number of internal complaints were filed with TDSB's Human Rights Office (HRO), who then commenced investigations into each of the complaints as required under the TDSB policy.

The dual investigations continued until approximately May 2020 when concerns were first raised by some complainants about a perceived conflict of interest in relation to the HRO set of investigations. As a result, TDSB agreed to their request to retain an independent external investigator to conduct the investigation into both the anonymous letter and the internal HRO complaints.

The TDSB retained investigators from the law firm of Turnpenney Milne LLP with experience investigating anti-Black racism, systemic racism, and discrimination. The external investigation commenced in June 2020. Notes from the two internal investigations were disclosed to the external investigators to assist in their investigation.

TDSB originally anticipated completion of the investigation by September 2020 following the initial assessment of the case by the external investigator, however initial timeline expectations set by TDSB had to be adjusted on several occasions to account for unexpected extraordinary challenges scheduling interviews with witnesses, such as:

- summer break: all school-based employees work for only 10 months and are normally unavailable in July and August;
- absences from work due to illness or other personal reasons;
- coordinating schedules with investigation team and many representatives/legal counsel/support persons;
- requests for scheduling accommodations due to *Human Rights Code* grounds and/or compassionate reasons;
- adjustments to investigation process due to COVID-19;
- lack of response to requests by investigators; and
- several process and operational matters.

TDSB has addressed these issues and implemented additional measures to help move this matter to its final stages.

During the course of the investigation, TDSB provided regular updates on the school's website in light of significant community and public interest. Previous updates can be found on the "[Investigations Updates](#)" tab on the left-hand side of the school's home page.

In September 2020, Toronto Police informed TDSB that it closed its investigation and confirmed its belief that there is no risk to student and staff safety related to the anonymous letter, including to those staff members referenced in the letter. This update was shared with the school community and investigation participants on [September 25, 2020](#).

Findings from Initial Report on Anonymous Letter

The investigators conducted almost 20 in-depth interviews and re-interviews with witnesses starting in late June 2020. The investigator attempted to arrange additional follow up interviews with some of the witnesses prior to the completion of this initial report, however some of those witnesses have not agreed to another interview or have sought to schedule the interviews later in mid-December or January 2021. The investigator believes none of these subsequent interviews are likely to shed any additional light on the phase 1 investigation as to who authored the letter, but will be important for the second phase of the investigation relating to the internal HRO complaints filed by several members of the school community.

The investigator found much witness speculation surrounding four possible suspects however in each case, despite significant probing, the investigator found there was insufficient evidence on a balance of probabilities that any of the suspects authored the letter. "Balance of probabilities" is the standard of proof where it is more likely than not that the suspect wrote the letter based on all the evidence collected.

The external investigator did suggest that some allegations required further investigation and made recommendations to TDSB on conducting additional interviews. In light of the investigator's findings and review of the evidence, TDSB has decided to refer this initial report to the Employee Services Investigations department to conduct additional follow up as recommended by the external investigators.

Next Steps for the Investigation

This complex investigation has required a significant amount of time by staff, community members, internal and external investigators, and is for many, a very emotional and difficult process.

We are intent on bringing the remaining phases of the investigation to a swift conclusion. We understand many in the community who are not directly involved in the investigations perceive "delays" in the investigation. While steps have been taken to move this process along faster, it is very important that this does not come at the expense of shortchanging the ability for all investigation participants, including the investigators, to conduct a thorough and fair investigation and arrive at well-informed findings and recommendations.

The external investigators are now focussing on completing the second, more complex phase. The multiple internal HRO complaints that are the subject of this part of the investigation are highly personal in nature to the complainants and respondents and are not shared with members of the public per TDSB policy and procedures. The outcome of this second phase of the investigation will only be shared with parties directly involved in the complaint (e.g., complainants, respondents) and their representatives or legal counsel.

Following this second phase, TDSB will receive a final report from the external investigators on the systemic issues identified by them arising from the first (anonymous letter) and second (internal HRO complaints) phases of the investigation. They will also provide a number of recommendations aimed to address those systemic issues that have been identified. We intend to share with the school community as much as we can of this final report while taking necessary measures to protect the personal privacy rights of the witnesses involved. In this respect, the TDSB has committed to consult with these individuals on any concerns they may have with public disclosure.

At this important milestone, notwithstanding the challenges outlined above, we wish to thank everyone who has participated in the investigation to date for their cooperation. We also thank the school community for your continued patience. We will continue to provide updates on any significant developments as they arise until completion of the remaining phases of the investigation, which we would like to complete by the end of January/February 2021 assuming witness availability.

School-based Initiatives

Our commitment from the start of this investigation was to ensure all staff, students and parents at QVPS feel safe, included and respected. This incident also required that the school community re-examine our current approach to dealing with issues affecting our black students' success and wellbeing. This same work is occurring across TDSB and throughout Ontario largely as a result of

advocacy by Black parents and allies, however the circumstances which sparked the multiple investigations at QVPS have deepened our resolve to stop the trauma caused by anti-Black racism and make our school community a leader in this important work.

With much work still in progress, we are encouraged by the support and commitment by staff, students and parents to embark on this new path. Through the leadership of Principal Matthew Webbe, Acting Principal Susan Yun (May/June 2020), Superintendents Nadira Persaud, Jacqueline Spence and Debbie Donsky, QVBSSC, and School Council, the school has invested significantly on a number of new initiatives and partnerships. For example:

- Three-part workshops series open to parents and educators on:
 - Research and data on the experiences, barriers and successes for Black children at the TDSB with Dr. Carl James, Professor of Education, York University
 - Disrupting Anti-Black Racism in Elementary Schools with Kike Ojo-Thompson, Consultant at Kojo Institute; and
 - Parent Guide to Understanding Policies, Practices and Human Rights - speakers' panel including Charlene Grant of Parents of Black Children and Black Lives Matter-Peel
- Regular staff professional development sessions featuring topics such as:
 - Accountability for anti-racism and anti-Black racism
 - Impacts on student learning and experience;
 - Shifting institutional practices to develop lessons/activities/unit plans with a strong equity framework and connection to student identities and voice; and
 - Connecting equity, well-being, achievement and community engagement to the school improvement plan
- Anti-oppression, anti-racism and anti-colonial discourses:
 - how to intentionally implement anti-racism work into class culture and through parent engagement and retainment strategies
 - Anti-Racism For Kids 101: Starting To Talk About Race
 - Foundational concepts related to anti-racism, including privilege, power, oppression, microaggressions, and bias
 - Equity Literacy
- Staff group exercises, individual activities and discussions to examine decolonizing, intersectionality, positionality, privilege and oppression in Canadian contexts such as understanding of the language surrounding anti-racism in order to facilitate safe and caring classroom/ school environments to support student learning and engagement
- Examining Anti-Black Racism and Anti-Indigenous Racism
- Examining Whiteness and White Supremacy:
 - unpacking White Supremacy Culture and Privilege to understand our own biases and privilege
 - shared understandings, commitments, work that needs to be done, comfort with the topic of race, and practical strategies on how to incorporate anti-racism/anti-Black racism elements in instructional practices.
- Colour Blindness and Colour Consciousness: how to intentionally implement anti-racism work into class culture and through parent engagement and retainment strategies.

Concluding Remarks

As discussed above, we intend to conclude the remaining two phases of the investigation as soon as possible and will update the school community and parties to the investigation as soon as we can.

In the meantime, TDSB continues to develop and implement initiatives to address systemic inequity in education as part of our commitments under the [Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#), including for example:

- Creation of a new Centre for Black Student Excellence;
- Development of a focused Strategy for Black Student Achievement and Excellence;
- Expansion of Human Rights Office mandate to include advisory and organizational change services;
- Creation of strategies to combat incidents of hate and racism through enhanced reporting, data gathering, and effective incident response; and
- Building leadership capacity to facilitate learning in human rights, equity and anti-oppression and to respond swiftly and decisively to incidents of anti-Black racism, including a learning series lead by Kojo Institute for all Trustees and senior team members.

Members of the school community are invited to share your thoughts and ideas on gaps and opportunities for further development with Principal Webbe and Superintendent Donsky.

Yours Truly,



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