



## MEASURING PROGRESS ON EQUITY Report No. 16-042

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)

5 April 2016

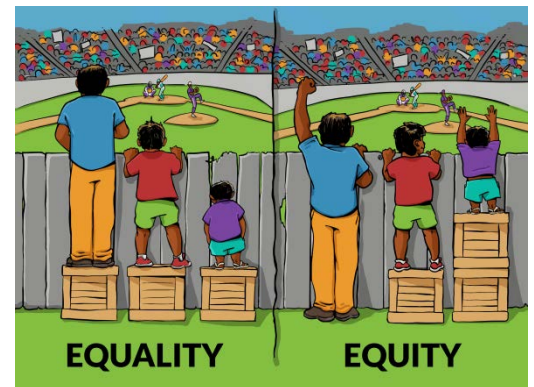
**Key Contact: Michele Giroux, Executive Officer, Corporate Services, 613-596-8211 ext. 8607**

### **Equity Objective - By 2019, the District will reduce barriers to learning to improve equity of access and opportunity for all students.**

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board identified equity as one of five key priority areas for the 2015-2019 strategic plan. In the plan, equity for the District is described as “a culture that continually balances equity of opportunity and access for all”. The objective states: “By 2019, the District will reduce barriers to learning to improve equity of access and opportunity for all students”. The strategies to support this objective are:

- “Develop and implement enhanced methodologies to differentiate the allocation of resources to improve equity of opportunity for all students”;
- “Identify students and groups of students who face barriers to learning and differentiate supports to close achievement gaps”; and
- “Review and ensure effective use of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit funding to increase First Nations, Metis, and Inuit graduation rates”.

The objective specifically makes reference to equity of *opportunity* and *access*. This is a challenging but important balance. Equity of opportunity is the philosophical ideal of fairness for all, which includes considerations such as program design and enrollment opportunities. Equity of access addresses practical considerations, such as where a program is located, capacity, etc. Our work on the equity objective requires careful consideration on what it means to achieve equity for all. For example, equal resources/supports do not necessarily lead to equity, as depicted in the image on the right. As a District, we must investigate barriers to learning and work to reduce those barriers so that students who are in disadvantaged situations have the supports needed to access learning opportunities equal to those of other students.



In 2013, the Ministry of Education published *Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12*. The guide supports high levels of student achievement, reduced achievement gaps, and increased public confidence. It highlights: personalization of student learning; precise instruction

tailored to the readiness and needs of individual students; and ongoing, focused professional learning for educators. The guide describes educational approaches to address these areas, which are currently being implemented at the OCDSB (e.g., differentiated instruction, use of assistive technology, etc.).

## Measures

The following quantitative measures provide evidence of progress on the equity objective:

- EQAO scores of identified groups relative to all students and the province;
- Graduation and certification rates of identified groups; and
- Assessments for measuring performance of students in specialized programs (Empower assessments, A4 Checklist).

In addition, the following qualitative data provides evidence of progress:

- Increases in awareness/understanding for identified groups;
- Changes made to existing programs to increase opportunity/access; and
- Implementation of accessibility requirements.

## EQAO data

The equity objective seeks to reduce barriers to learning to improve equity of access and opportunity for all students. To achieve this goal, an important first step is to develop a better understanding of students who are in disadvantaged situations and identify ways to support their learning. This aims to reduce the *learning gap* – the gap between a student’s actual achievement and his or her potential for achievement. When specific groups of students are not reaching their potential, disparity between groups of students are formed – this is referred to as the *achievement gap*. Of particular interest are the achievement gaps between all students and the following identified groups:

- English Language Learners (ELLs; 21% of elementary students and 14% of secondary students);
- Students with special needs (19% of elementary and secondary students, not including gifted);
- Students who have self-identified as First Nations, Metis, or Inuit (FNMI; 2% of elementary and secondary students); and
- Students residing in lower-income neighbourhoods<sup>1</sup>.

One way in which we can monitor progress on the equity objective is to examine the achievement gaps for identified groups of students, as compared to all students, and how they change over time. Achievement gaps can be measured using data from EQAO assessments, from which we can examine trends in narrowing the gaps. EQAO data from the 2014-2015 year would ideally be the baseline year of data for the 2015-2019 strategic plan. However, 2014-2015 EQAO data is only available for the OSSLT

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<sup>1</sup> Proportions of student population are based on 2013-2014 EQAO data (weighted proportions for grade 3 and 6 for elementary; and weighted proportions for both math courses and first-time eligible OSSLT for secondary). EQAO data for students residing in lower-income neighbours is not available.

assessment. Therefore, for all other assessments, data from 2013-2014 will be used to determine baseline levels of achievement.

Looking at EQAO data over the past three years (see tables below), the general trend for primary and junior literacy assessments is that all students, as a group, are more likely to meet the provincial standard over time. Although the identified groups tend to be less successful meeting the provincial standard, as compared to all students, the trajectory over the years follows a similar pattern of gradual increase. Primary and junior math scores remained relatively stable over time, although there was a decrease in junior math for almost all groups – particularly for students with special education needs. For the secondary panel, increases for all groups were evident in grade 9 applied math, while scores remained fairly consistent for grade 9 academic math and the OSSLT (FTE and PE).

One clear exception to the overall trends, as evidenced in the graphs below, is the performance of identified FNMI students. Although data has only been disaggregated for this group since 2012-2013, there is evidence of substantial growth. This data is promising given that the FNMI student population is a relatively new area of focus for the OCDSB, with targeted intervention aimed at supporting these students. It will be important to keep momentum with this progress.

Also evident from the graphs below, an area of focus for future work is to further support our students with special education needs. As a group, these students are less likely to meet the provincial standard for all literacy and numeracy assessments at the elementary level, as compared to all students and all other identified groups. Interestingly, there is evidence of gains made in elementary literacy, but decreases in elementary mathematics. Future work in this area will aim to support students in achieving their full potential.

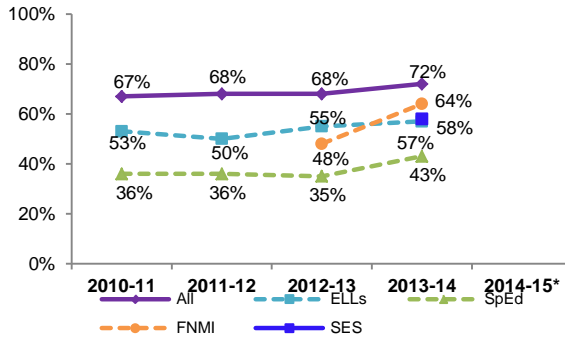
Of additional interest are the provincial comparisons for identified groups, which are discussed in more detail in the relevant sections below. The achievement gaps between ELLs and all students are notably wider for the OCDSB, as compared to the province, for both literacy and numeracy. OCDSB participation rates for ELLs, however, are much higher. As with students with special education needs, future work will aim to reduce the learning gap for these students.

It is important to note that when interpreting these trends, we assume that those included in the dataset are an accurate representation of that particular student population. However, it is likely that there are students within a specific population who are unidentified by the OCDSB, and are therefore not included in the analysis. It is also the case that some students are represented in more than one identified group, and/or that a group which merits particular attention is not included in the analysis. For example, there have at times been questions about disaggregating data by race or ethnicity; however, EQAO does not currently disaggregate data in this manner. The availability of, and limitations on, the existing data highlight the importance of providing

supports to all students, to ensure that even those students who may face unidentified barriers to learning are receiving equal opportunities.

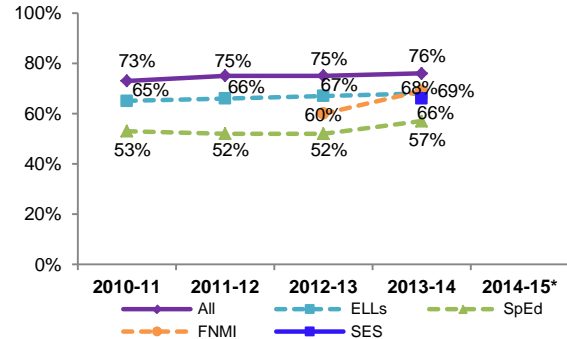
### Percentage of Students who met the Provincial Standard in Literacy

#### Grade 3 Reading



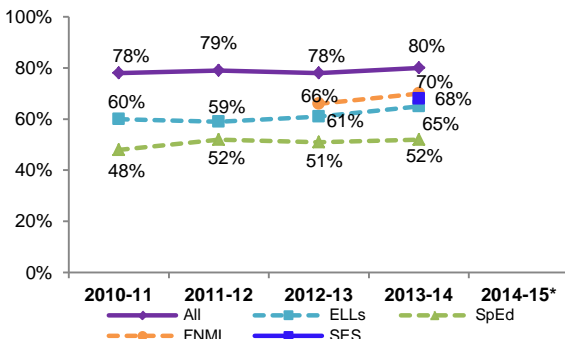
	Gaps (All - Identified Group)				
ELL	14%	18%	13%	15%	NA
SpEd	31%	32%	33%	29%	NA
FNMI	-	-	20%	8%	NA
SES	-	-	-	14%	NA

#### Grade 3 Writing



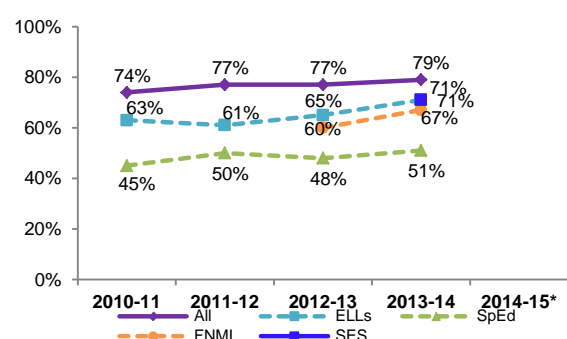
	Gaps (All - Identified Group)				
ELL	8%	9%	8%	8%	NA
SpEd	20%	23%	23%	19%	NA
FNMI	-	-	15%	7%	NA
SES	-	-	-	10%	NA

#### Grade 6 Reading



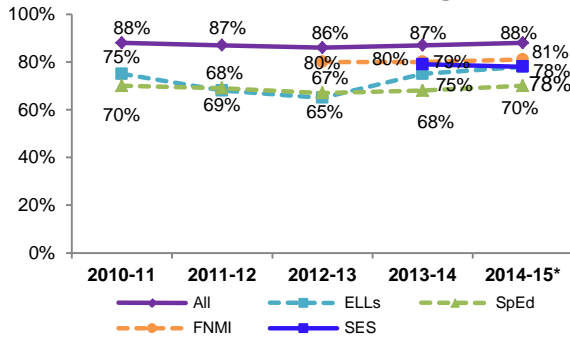
	Gaps (All - Identified Group)				
ELL	18%	20%	17%	15%	NA
SpEd	30%	27%	27%	28%	NA
FNMI	-	-	12%	10%	NA
SES	-	-	-	12%	NA

#### Grade 6 Writing



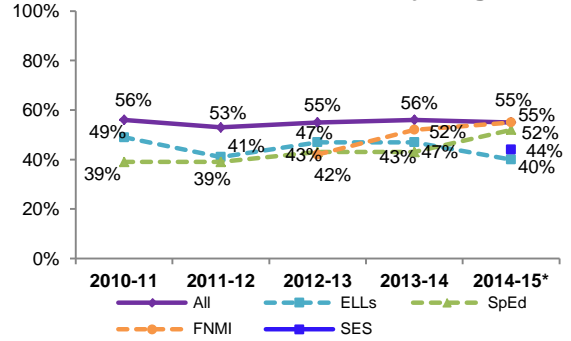
	Gaps (All - Identified Group)				
ELL	11%	16%	12%	8%	NA
SpEd	29%	27%	29%	28%	NA
FNMI	-	-	17%	12%	NA
SES	-	-	-	8%	NA

### OSSLT First Time Eligible



	Gaps (All - Identified Group)				
<b>ELL</b>	13%	19%	21%	12%	10%
<b>SpEd</b>	18%	18%	19%	19%	18%
<b>FNMI</b>	-	-	6%	7%	7%
<b>SES</b>	-	-	-	8%	10%

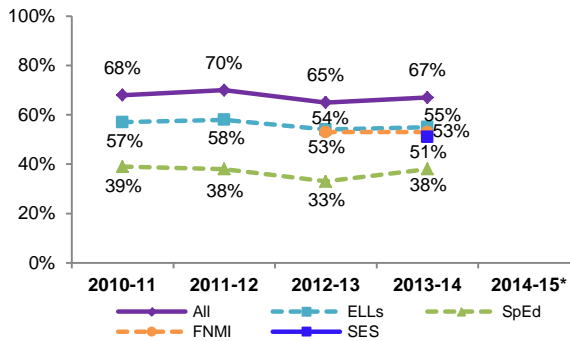
### OSSLT Previously Eligible



	Gaps (All - Identified Group)				
<b>ELL</b>	7%	12%	8%	9%	15%
<b>SpEd</b>	17%	14%	12%	13%	3%
<b>FNMI</b>	-	-	13%	4%	0%
<b>SES</b>	-	-	-	-	11%

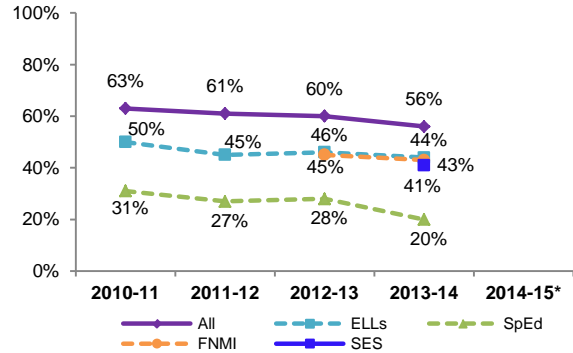
## Percentage of Students who met the Provincial Standard in Mathematics

### Grade 3 Mathematics

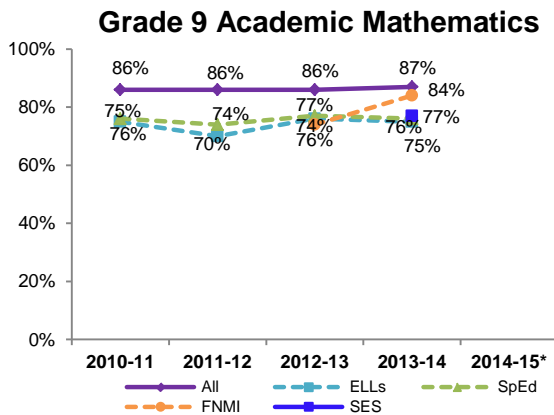


	Gaps (All - Identified Group)				
<b>ELL</b>	11%	12%	11%	12%	NA
<b>SpEd</b>	29%	32%	32%	29%	NA
<b>FNMI</b>	-	-	12%	14%	NA
<b>SES</b>	-	-	-	16%	NA

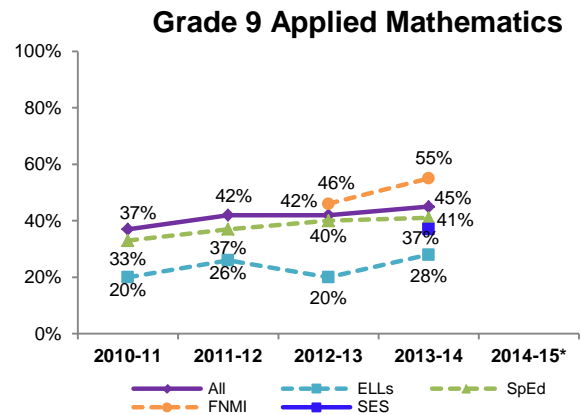
### Grade 6 Mathematics



	Gaps (All - Identified Group)				
<b>ELL</b>	13%	16%	14%	12%	NA
<b>SpEd</b>	32%	34%	32%	36%	NA
<b>FNMI</b>	-	-	15%	13%	NA
<b>SES</b>	-	-	-	15%	NA



	Gaps (All - Identified Group)				
ELL	11%	16%	10%	12%	NA
SpEd	10%	12%	9%	11%	NA
FNMI	-	-	12%	3%	NA
SES	-	-	-	10%	NA



	Gaps (All - Identified Group)				
ELL	17%	16%	22%	17%	NA
SpEd	4%	5%	2%	4%	NA
FNMI	-	-	-4%	-10%	NA
SES	-	-	-	8%	NA

## English Language Learners (ELLs)

English Language Learners were less likely to meet the provincial standard, compared to all students, across all literacy and numeracy assessments in the OCDSB. In literacy, gaps ranged from 8-15% and were 1-10% wider than those observed provincially. Compared to the average gap for the previous three years (2010-2013 for primary/junior assessments; 2011-2014 for OSSLT), the literacy achievement gaps for ELLs have:

- narrowed by 3% for grade 6 reading, by 5% for grade 6 writing, and by 7% for the OSSLT(FTE);
- remained the same for grade 3 reading and writing; and
- widened by 5% for the OSSLT(PE).

In numeracy, gaps for ELLs ranged from 12-17% and were 8-9% wider than the provincial results. Compared to the average gap for the previous three years (2010-2013), the achievement gaps in numeracy for ELLs have:

- narrowed by 2% for grade 6 mathematics and 1% for grade 9 applied mathematics;
- remained the same for grade 9 academic mathematics; and
- widened by 1% for grade 3 mathematics.

Compared to the province, the District made less progress towards narrowing achievement gaps in literacy and numeracy for ELLs, with the exception of those who were first-time eligible for the OSSLT. It should be noted, however, that participation rates for this group of students are much higher for the OCDSB than they are for the province. Although there was no change for the primary assessments, OCDSB participation rates for the junior assessments increased by 2-3% (in 2013-2014, as compared to the average across the three previous years). Furthermore, participation

rates increased by 1% for grade 9 mathematics (both applied and academic, 2013-2014) and by 10% and 4% for the OSSLT (2014-2015; FTE and PE, respectively).

### **Students with Special Needs**

Students identified with special education needs were less likely to meet the provincial standard, compared to all students, across all literacy and numeracy assessments. Gaps in literacy ranged from 3-29% and were 1-11% narrower than those observed provincially. Compared to the average gap for the previous three years (2010-2013 for primary/junior assessments; 2011-2014 for OSSLT), the achievement gaps for OCDSB students with special education needs, based on the most recent literacy data, have:

- narrowed by 3% for grade 3 reading and writing, by 1% for the OSSLT(FTE), and by 10% for the OSSLT (PE); and
- remained the same for grade 6 reading and writing.

In numeracy, gaps ranged from 4%-36% and were 1%-5% wider than those observed provincially. Compared to the average gap for the previous three years (2010-2013), the achievement gaps in numeracy for students with special education needs have:

- narrowed by 2% for grade 3 mathematics;
- remained the same for grade 9 applied mathematics; and
- widened by 3% for grade 6 mathematics and by 1% for grade 9 academic mathematics.

The OCDSB made greater progress than the province in narrowing the achievement gaps in literacy for students with special education needs. The District made less progress than the province, however, in narrowing these achievement gaps in numeracy. Similar to the ELL population, a greater proportion of students with special education needs participated in these assessments at the OCDSB, as compared to the province. In addition, the participation rates of OCDSB students with special education needs have tended to increase over the years. Compared to the average across the three previous years, participation rates have increased by 1-4% for the 2013-2014 primary and junior assessments, and by 4% and 2% 2014-2015 OSSLT (FTE and PE, respectively). Grade 9 mathematics participation remained the same.

### **Students who have Self-Identified as First Nations, Metis, or Inuit (FNMI)**

OCDSB students who self-identified as FNMI were less likely to meet the provincial standard, compared to all students, across most literacy and numeracy assessments. Gaps in literacy between FNMI students and all students ranged from 0-12%<sup>2</sup>. Based on the most recent year of data (2013-2014 for primary/junior assessments; 2014-2015 for OSSLT), compared to the previous year(s)<sup>3</sup>, the achievement gaps for students who self-identified as FNMI have narrowed by 2-12% for all assessments of literacy except for the OSSLT (FTE), which remained the same.

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<sup>2</sup> Provincial comparisons could not be made for FNMI students as a group. At the provincial level, EQAO does not report the percentage of FNMI students (as a group) who achieved the provincial standard.

<sup>3</sup> Note that 2012-2013 was the first year for which FNMI data was made available.

FNMI students were less likely to meet the provincial standard than all students in grade 3 and 6 mathematics, and in grade 9 academic mathematics, with gaps ranging from 3-14%. In contrast, FNMI students were more likely to meet the provincial standard, as compared to all students, in grade 9 applied mathematics – with a gap of 10%. Compared to the previous year (2013-2014), the achievement gaps for students who self-identified as FNMI have narrowed by 2-9% for all assessments of numeracy except for grade 3 mathematics, which has widened by 2%.

### **Students Residing in Lower-Income Neighbourhoods (SES)<sup>4</sup>**

Compared to all students, students residing in lower-income neighbourhoods were less likely to meet the provincial standard across all literacy and numeracy assessments. Gaps between this group of students and all students ranged from 8-14% in literacy and 8-16% in numeracy. Compared to the previous year, the achievement gap for students living in lower income neighbourhoods widened by 2% on the OSSLT(FTE) – this is the only assessment for which two years of data is available.

### **Graduation and Certification Rates**

Students from the 2009-2010 grade 9 cohort ( $N = 5,348$ ), who could be tracked within the OCDSB, had a graduation rate of 79% (i.e., graduated from an OCDSB secondary school within five years, earning an OSSD). An examination of the identified groups revealed the following trends:

- 82% of ELLs (270 of 329) earned an OSSD, compared to 70% (233 of 331) previously;
- 63% of students identified with a special education need (not including gifted; 767 of 1,209), earned an OSSD, compared to 62% (801 of 1288) last year; 10% were still enrolled in an OCDSB school in the fall of their 6th year of secondary school;
- 77% of students who self-identified as FNMI (171 of 222) earned an OSSD within five years, compared to 82% (164 of 199) previously;
- 69% of students residing in lower income neighbourhoods (953 of 1,390) earned an OSSD; this is the first year in which data has been disaggregated for this identified group of students.

The Annual Certification Rate (ACR; as described in detail in Report 15-023) reflects the proportion of students who have earned an OSSD, an Ontario Secondary School Certification (OSSC), or a Certificate of Accomplishment (COA) from an OCDSB secondary school (or Crystal Bay, Clifford Bowey) in what is theoretically their final year of school. The ACR for 2014-2015 was 88%. Data was disaggregated by identified student group, and the following observations were made:

- Compared to the overall student population, ELLs (85%), students who self-identified as FNMI (71%), and students residing in lower-income neighbourhoods (79%) were less likely to earn a diploma or certificate. Although they were less likely to earn a diploma/certificate, compared to the general population, the ACR

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<sup>4</sup> This identified group includes students whose postal code is within a geographic area in which the proportion of families living below the low income measure after tax is greater than that for the City of Ottawa as a whole. More details about this calculation can be found in Report 15-041.



for ELLs reflects an increase of 5% compared to the previous year; for students who self-identified as FNMI, the rate has decreased from 84%;

- Students with a special education need (not including gifted students) were somewhat more likely to earn a diploma or certificate (89%) compared to the overall student population; this reflects a modest decline from 91% observed in the previous year. This is a striking difference as compared to the graduation rate for this group (63%). This difference between graduation and certification rates helps to illuminate the fact that it may take more than five years for some students to attain one of these Ministry-recognized diplomas/certificates.

### **Assessments for students in specialized programs**

The support provided to students with special needs is important work under the equity objective. Students with special education needs comprise approximately 19% of the student population at the OCDSB, and approximately 4% of students are in specialized programs. These specialized programs exist for students with a range of needs, and reviews of these programs are on-going to ensure equitable access to programming that is of greatest benefit to our students (a Learning Disability review was completed in January 2016; a Gifted review is underway). Furthermore, a geographical model is being implemented to ensure that programs are stabilized in different areas within the district and that students who are identified have access to a program in their community.

Recent work has changed the way in which we approach specialized programs at the OCDSB. For example, through the Learning Disability (LD) review, we have become better able to understand the pathways taken by students with LD and the limitations within the specialized program. Based on evidence that the existing LD program was not fully serving the needs of our students, important changes are being made. The shift to a one-year, intensive program will result in reduced waitlists and greater access for students. Following the implementation of the changes to the program, on-going to monitoring will take place based on various success indicators. Equity of access and opportunity will be monitored based on: (i) an increase in the number of students accessing their home/community school (as opposed to an Adaptive site); (ii) an increase in pathways accessed by students with LD at the secondary level; and (iii) an increase in access for students with various socio-economic backgrounds (if possible based on the data available). Based on these changes, the focus will be on all students with LD, not just those in the specialized program.

Moving forward, the more global approach for monitoring the progress of students with LD (looking beyond the small proportion in the specialized program), will be considered when assessing progress for all exceptionalities. One way in which this can be done is by refocusing the Learning Support Services' biennial report: Performance Measures for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board Learning Support Services. In its current form, this report presents data from carefully selected assessment tools to examine outcomes for each of the specialized programs offered at the OCDSB. The most recent report was produced in January 2014, and an updated version is anticipated in the near future. The results from upcoming reports will aim to take a more global approach and

will be used to measure progress over the course of the new strategic plan. Although the structure of the recent reports do not include year over year comparisons, data from the January 2014 report highlights some areas in which data was collected at multiple time points from 2011-2012. Two of the key measures included in the report were:

- Empower Assessments
  - Students in the Learning Disability Elementary Program significantly improved in terms of performance on all Empower assessments, with scores increasing by: 17% on letter-sound identification; 54% on sound combinations; 100% on challenge words; and 8% on phonological awareness.
  - Students in the Language Learning Disability program significantly improved in terms of performance on all Empower assessments, with scores increasing by: 33% on letter-sound identification; 80% on sound combinations; 138% on challenge words; and 44% on phonological awareness.
- Assessing Achievement in Alternative Areas (A4) Checklist
  - Students in the Secondary General Learning Program significantly improved on 10 of the 14 subscales administered, with average rating changes of -0.08 to +0.77 (out of a possible maximum of 3). The largest increases were for in-school work skills, social work attitude, and hygiene.
  - Students in the Physical Support Program significantly improved on 5 of the 8 subscales administered, with average rating changes ranging of +0.05 to +0.24. The largest increases were for home maintenance and in-school work skills.
  - Students Dual Support Program significantly improved on only one of the 16 subscales administered (job initiation skills), with average rating changes of -0.30 to +0.15. The overall score for A4 subscales increased from 1.16 to 1.34.

### Evidence from Key Work on Equity

In addition to the measures described, progress on the equity objective is evidenced by the implementation of strategies outlined in the strategic plan. Key work related to these strategies, as specified in the Director's Workplan for 2015-2016, includes:

- Strategy: "Develop and implement enhanced methodologies to differentiate the allocation of resources to improve equity of opportunity for all students"

Key work: A socio-economic status index has been developed to identify students residing in lower-income neighbourhoods. These students are identified based on having a postal code for a geographic area in which a high proportion of families are identified as lower income (more details about how this index is calculated can be found in Report 15-041). The identification of this group of students is an important step in ensuring equity of opportunity and access.

- Strategy: "Identify students and groups of students who face barriers to learning and differentiate supports to close achievement gaps"

Key work: Gender identity guidelines have been developed and implementation has begun to support students of all gender identities/expressions. Furthermore, supports

for English Language Learners have been enhanced including an increase in secondary itinerant teachers, use of STEP assessments, and accommodations for learners.

- Strategy: “Review and ensure effective use of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit funding to increase First Nations, Metis, and Inuit graduation rates”.

Key work: An FNMI strategy is being implemented, and a report on progress was presented in October 2015 (Report 15-120) with future reports planned on an annual basis. The recent report spoke to the various initiatives being undertaken to support FNMI students, and included a description of the partnership forged with the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. Furthermore, resources have been allocated to support FNMI students in a number of ways. For example, a Student Support/Re-engagement Coordinator for FNMI students has recently been hired to re-engage disengaged students and to support students at risk of disengagement. Additionally, schools with a high proportion of self-identified students are provided with support such as the Indigenous Voices In Schools Program which includes elders, Peoples of the Longhouse, and TRC workshops. Other supports include funding for Native Studies courses, with teachers providing an account of how the funds are being used.

Next steps will involve staff continuing to create a more transparent picture of how and where funding is allocated, sharing this information with the community, and monitoring student outcomes (e.g., student achievement scores and graduation rates).

### **Increases in Awareness/Understanding for Identified Groups**

One way in which we promote equity is by strengthening relationships to make schools a welcoming learning environment for all. An important part of this work is increasing awareness/understanding of students and staff. This not only benefits the identified group, but the OCDSB population as a whole. Recent work has been done to develop strategies and target resources for two groups of interest: (i) First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students; and (ii) students of all gender identities and/or sexual orientations.

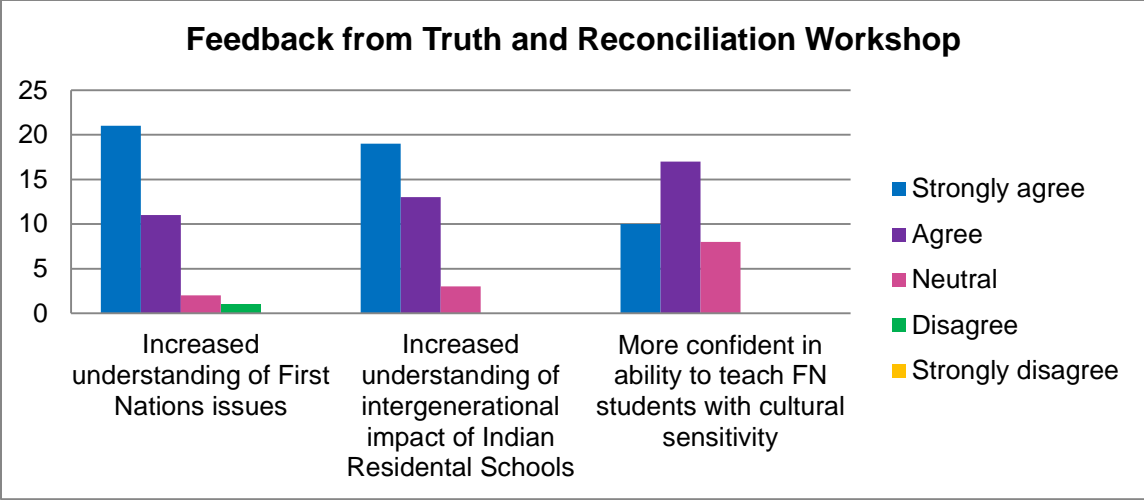
### **First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Students**

Work being done to achieve equity of opportunity and access for FNMI students includes:

- Supporting Students
  - supporting pre-school and kindergarten-age FNMI students as they transition from highly culturally responsive environments into mainstream programs and classes;
  - a working group consider primary resource materials from the Truth and Reconciliation National Education Centre and identify the point of integration in Canadian and World Studies;
  - integration of Aboriginal talking circles in the Restorative Practices Program;
  - Aboriginal tutors at Urban Aboriginal High School;
  - Student Leadership Camp;
  - School Within a College Program and Student Support/Re-engagement Coordinator to re-engage disengaged students; and
  - Dare to Dream Program to teach students about the legal system and careers.

- Supporting Educators
  - FNMI Instructional Coach to facilitate professional development and provide system supports;
  - FNMI education representatives in all schools to disseminate information and resources through the system;
  - professional development to build awareness of nature and purpose of self-identification;
  - professional development focused on extent and consequences of Intergenerational Trauma;
  - IART professional development days to explore use of Aboriginal art and cultural content through all curriculum areas; and
  - working with community partners and elders to build capacity for teachers to utilize cross-curricular circles.
- Engagement and Awareness Building
  - strategic distribution of the self-identification information brochure;
  - working and communicating with community partners (Wabano, Ottawa Inuit Children's Centre, and elders) to increase awareness of nature and use of voluntary self-identification;
  - working with parents and staff to identify sites with large FNMI populations, and work with those communities to increase awareness of voluntary self-identification;
  - participation in various committees working on improving lives of Aboriginal people in Ottawa (Aboriginal Working Committee, Aboriginal Education Committee, and other community agencies); and
  - small councils to celebrate the work and share information – a forum for parents to voice perceived strengths, challenges, and next steps.

Although the impact of this work is reflected, at least in part, in student achievement scores, evidence is gathered through other means as well. One example of such evidence is feedback from a workshop provided in partnership with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. This workshop was designed to build staff capacity and awareness of resources for teaching First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students with cultural sensitivity, and for better understanding First Nations issues, as well as gaining a better understanding of the intergenerational impact of the Indian Residential School experience. Approximately 35 teachers attended this workshop, with feedback indicating that the workshop led to an increased understanding and confidence as depicted in the graph below.



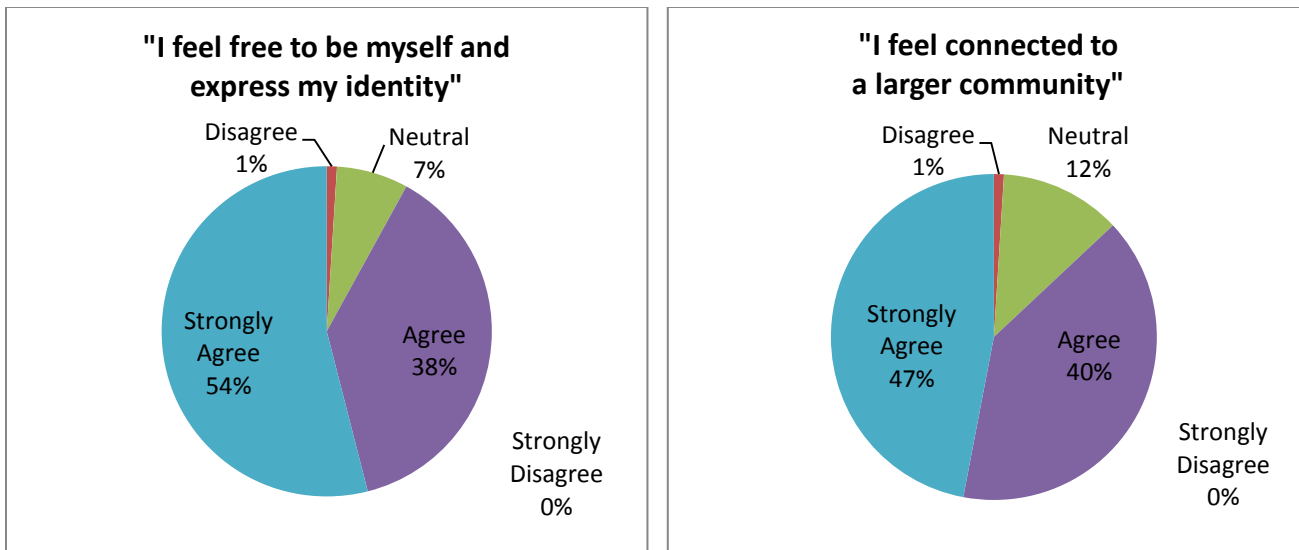
**Students of all gender identities and/or sexual orientations**

The OCDSB also works to promote inclusivity for students, regardless of gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Some of this work includes:

- Supporting Students
  - Rainbow Youth Forum to celebrate diversity, as described in detail in more below;
  - Rainbow Spring Fling (an annual District-wide dance open to all students);
  - Day of Information for a Lifetime in Action (DILA) Program; and
  - Roots of Empathy Program.
- Supporting Educators
  - Inclusive, Safe and Caring Schools Instructional Coach to facilitate professional development and provide system supports;
  - development of system-wide guidelines to support the accommodation of transgender students;
  - professional development sessions on gender identity awareness, issues, and protocols/guidelines; and
  - on-going consultations with school administrators and system staff to support students who are transitioning.
- Engagement and Awareness Building
  - partnership with Family Services Ottawa to consult on issues of gender identity and sexual orientation affecting Ottawa youth and families;
  - participation in community panel for Ottawa Public Health Nurses on supporting transgender students; and
  - involvement with Rainbow Service Providers Network to work with community agencies serving LGBTQ+ youth and families in OCDSB schools and to maintain the OCDSB relationship with the LGBTQ+ community in Ottawa.

The OCDSB’s Rainbow Youth Forum is an annual high school conference which invites students and staff to participate in a day to celebrate diversity. The goal of the day is to help staff and students enhance their knowledge and awareness of gender identity, sexual orientation and gender expression, and to address the issues of homophobia,

biphobia, and transphobia in order to encourage safer and more inclusive school environments. The 2016 Forum attracted over 300 students and approximately 70 staff. At the end of the day, students were asked to indicate how they felt prior to attending the event and how they felt after. Responses indicated that, after attending the forum, 41% of students increased their agreement with the statement “I feel free to be myself and express my identity” and 50% increased their agreement with the statement “I feel connected to a larger community”. Overall, at the conclusion of the event, students clearly demonstrated strong agreement with feeling able to express themselves and connection to a larger community, as indicated in the graphs below.



### Program changes

The District’s attention to equity has influenced the work of senior staff and, in turn, changed the way decisions are made. The equity objective maintains a focus on equity of *opportunity* and *access*. This focus was the driving force behind the upcoming changes to French instruction in kindergarten. As a result of these changes, early exposure to French for all kindergarten students, together in a unified program, is being implemented – increasing equity of opportunity. Furthermore, all students will be able to attend Kindergarten at their community school (as compared to the school being dictated by the program of enrollment) – increasing equity of access.

A focus on equity has driven reviews of other programs as well. For example, work is also being done to consider a second site for the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program to improve access both in terms of capacity (allowing for more students to enroll) and geographic location (considering the addition of the second location in the west end, given that the existing location is located in the east). Other reviews undertaken by senior staff include the Canterbury Arts Program and programs and services for students with Learning Disabilities (as discussed on page 9). Such reviews involve critical reflection on existing programs and consideration of how such programs can be improved in terms of equity and opportunity. In some cases (e.g., IB Program, Canterbury Arts), next steps will involve revisiting program entrance criteria and

possible exploration of how such changes may impact the diversity of the student population enrolled.

### **Implementation of accessibility requirements**

Another barrier which some students face is difficulty with accessibility. OCDSB staff work to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility. An Accessibility Working Group (AWG) has been established, which includes members from the community who have disabilities and representatives from central departments and schools. The AWG normally meets four times over the course of the school year and:

- conducts research on barriers to people with disabilities in all facilities, regulations, policies and programs, practices and services offered by the District;
- identifies barriers to be addressed, removed or prevented; discusses, reviews and provides advice on the various initiatives, practices, policies, procedures and protocols with regard to their impact on persons with disabilities; and
- communicates its work.

The AWG supports the:

- continual improvement of access to school premises, facilities and services for all persons regardless of ability;
- participation of people regardless of their ability and their advocates in the development and review of its annual accessibility report and multi-year plan;
- provision of services to all students, employees, parents of students and members of the community with disabilities.

As outlined in Report 15-103, significant progress has been made implementing the Integrated Accessibility Standards (AODA, 2005):

- General Requirements (e.g., establishment of an accessibility policy – Board Policy P.121.GOV; Multi-Year Plan for the Implementation of the Integrated Regulation, 2012-2016; annual reporting on accessibility; training on accessibility standards and Human Rights Code);
- Information and Communications Standards (e.g., in accordance with Procedure PR.566.GOV, the District provides or arranges for provision of accessible formats and communication supports for persons with disabilities; rollout of standardized, accessible websites for all schools and education centres; accessibility awareness training provided to staff);
- Employment Standards (e.g., all job postings include a statement notifying candidates that application packages are available in accessible formats upon request; a procedure for Disability Support Program – Individual Accommodation Plans, PR.HR.572, is being implemented; accessibility needs are considered in leadership training and promotional processes);
- Transportation Standards (e.g., accessible school transportation services are provided); and
- Design of Public Spaces (e.g., senior staff in Facilities were briefed on the Design of Public Spaces Standards and provided with information to use in future planning; staff is developing a Playground Development Guideline).

## Next Steps

This report reviews indicators of progress on equity as a strategic priority. In the first year of the new strategic plan, the report provides baseline data for assessing future progress over the course of the four-year strategic plan. This data helps to address areas of need so that supports and resources can be allocated appropriately. This information will be particularly useful for the Advisory Committee on Equity and its work promoting an equitable and inclusive environment, as well as the Special Education Advisory Committee and its work to ensure we are meeting the needs of our students with exceptionalities.

As a District priority, equity is interrelated with the other strategic objectives. Specifically, work on equity aims to close gaps in learning, engagement, and well-being, as well as to exercise stewardship of resources as we differentiate among groups. An equity lens will be applied to all key work, not just that under the equity objective.

The strengthening of relationships with identified groups is an important aspect of future work. Through continual engagement of groups at risk, we can gather feedback on supports that are needed and supports that are having the greatest impact. This work is supported by the Equity and Diversity Coordinator, the Inclusive Safe and Caring Schools Instructional Coach, the FNMI Instructional Coach, the Student Support/Re-engagement Coordinator for FNMI students, as well as classroom educators and other staff.

## Guiding Questions

The following questions are provided to support the discussion of this item by the Committee:

- How does our achievement data inform our progress on the equity objective?
- What factors should be considered in balancing equity of opportunity and equity of access?
- How do we continue to improve our understanding/awareness of the barriers which impact the learning of identified groups of students?
- How will the work underway support further progress on the equity objective?
- How does this work relate to the work under the other strategic objectives?

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