

ENGAGED IN EQUITY



MOVING FROM GREAT TO EXCELLENT!

Ensuring Equity

"Everyone, regardless of background or personal circumstance, must feel engaged and included."

This fall school boards across the province are reviewing the Ministry of Education's renewed vision for success in Ontario schools entitled [Achieving Excellence](#). During the 2013-2014 school year, the Ministry embarked on a province-wide consultation to discuss the skills and knowledge Ontario students require to be successful and contributing citizens of society. The feedback was used to design the Ministry's renewed vision for education which identifies new goals that build on the Ministry's current priorities.

The revised goals are; [Achieving Excellence](#), [Ensuring Equity](#), [Promoting Well-Being](#) and [Enhancing Public Confidence](#).

The four goals serve as an interconnected map that school boards can use to guide their improvement planning processes as they work to achieve their respective goals for student achievement and well-being. We are excited to see that ensuring equity is a clearly defined goal for the Ministry that will work to close gaps for all our learners.

As defined by the Ministry, the goal of ensuring equity speaks to the strength that diversity brings to our society, while at the same time acknowledging that "excellence and equity go hand in hand." Research continues to support the fact that students who have a strong sense of belonging, feel welcomed and accepted, and see themselves positively in their learning environments can and will achieve success. Therefore it is incumbent upon us as an education system to continue to work diligently to ensure equity through the identification and intentional removal of barriers that continue to hinder the success of some students. Many of our equity initiatives have been and continue to be designed to this end.

As identified by our new Director J. Parappally, we can be proud of the excellent work that has been done and continue to work toward an integrated approach for equitable and inclusive practices across our school board for the future!

YRDSB Faith and "Diamond Days"

Sept 1	First Parkash
Sept 8	Ananta Chaturdasi
Sept 11	Coptic New Year
Sept 22	Mabon
Sept 25 - Oct 3	Navaratri
Sept 25 - 26	Rosh Hashanah
Oct 3	Day of Arafat (Hajj)
Oct 4	Eid-ul-Adha
Oct 4	Yom Kippur
Oct 5	World Communion Sunday
Oct 8	Pavarana
Oct 9	Kathina
Oct 9 - 15	Sukkot
Oct 16	Shemini Atzeret
Oct 17	Simchat Torah
Oct 20	The Birth of the Bab
Oct 23	Diwali
Oct 23	Mahavira Nirvana
Oct 24 - 28	Skanda Shashti Vratam
Oct 25	First Day of Muharram
Oct 28	Jnana Panchami
Oct 31	Samhain
Nov 1	All Saints' Day
Nov 3	Ashura
Nov 6	Birthday of Guru Nanak Dev Ji
Nov 12	The Birth of Baba'u'llah
Nov 24	Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadar Ji
Nov 26	The Day of the Covenant
Nov 28	Ascension of Abdu'l-Baha
Nov 30	First Sunday of Advent (Western)

Inside this Edition

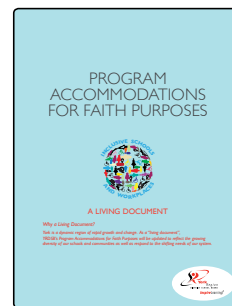
- Program Accommodations for Faith Purposes
- ISCS Update
- Building Blocks for Kindergarten!
- SI Students study Mandarin
- Holocaust Education Week
- Equity and Inclusivity Professional Learning
- Addressing Poverty in the Classroom
- Summer Youth Leadership Program



Program Accommodations for Faith Purposes

In our spring 2014 newsletter, we shared the news of our Board's revised guidelines and new resources to support schools with conversations regarding religious accommodations. We would like to share further information about some of the new resources, which are all available on the BWW!

As you look through the many new resources highlighted below, you will notice there are two terms used when referencing requests for accommodations for faith purposes; **Religious Accommodations** and **Program Accommodations**. The term *Religious Accommodations* is grounded in the Ontario Human Rights Code and found in Board Procedure #261.8, Equity and Inclusivity: Religious Accommodation. The term *Program Accommodations* refers to the many ways we can provide support and differentiate our programs based on student needs. The materials that have been developed to support staff and students in the classroom for program accommodations are also supportive when having conversations about faith with staff members in the workplace.



The previous guidelines have been replaced with a new document called [Program Accommodations for Faith Purposes: A Guideline for Religious Accommodations](#). This living document is helpful in building understanding of the different faith groups and faith traditions represented in our diverse school communities. These guidelines specifically provide information about faith groups, their religious requirements, practices and observances, and were created to support staff members and students as we have conversations that surround religious accommodations. As a living document, it will continue to grow and support our discussions as schools develop program accommodations that best support their students.

School staff will have noticed a new Board form in this year's start-up package – the [Religious Accommodations Invitation Form](#). It invites families to request accommodations for religious beliefs and practices in a variety of areas of school life. The form can be used at anytime during the school year when a verbal or written request is received. It asks for information from the family and replaces the previous questionnaire.

The [Framework for Inviting and Responding to Requests for Religious Accommodations in K-12 Curriculum Areas](#) replaces the previous Framework for Religious Accommodations. In this document, you will find a suggested cycle of ongoing dialogue that supports staff members with a process to follow, and includes a checklist for each stage in the process when a parent/guardian makes a request for an accommodation.

We now have an expanded [Sample Curricular Accommodation](#) document. It includes examples in more frequently requested subjects and can be adjusted for any subject area depending on the request.

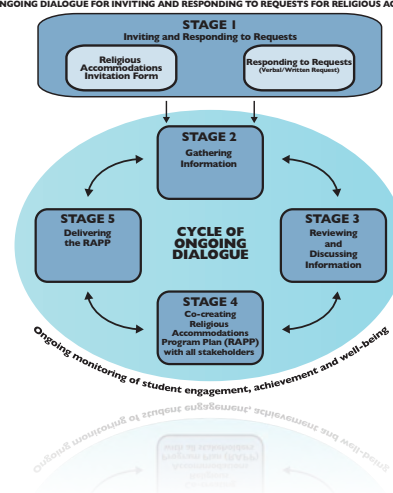
Still looking for support? You will find the [System Contact List](#) a very timely tool. This list is updated each year with Board staff members who are available to help people work through the process of responding to requests for accommodations. Staff members on this list are available to assist you with the conversations you may have with families and can provide assistance/direction regarding Board resources to help with your planning.

The newest document – the [Religious Accommodations Program Plan](#) – is a planning template that will help educators track the accommodations provided. Staff responding to a request are encouraged to create this plan with all stakeholders involved. It was developed to assist in monitoring and supporting student success and can be adjusted as needed throughout multiple school years.

To help support schools with these many new resources, a webcast called [An Introduction to Program Accommodations for Faith Purposes: A Guideline for Religious Accommodations](#), will be available on the BWW shortly. It introduces each of the resources mentioned in this article and captures the thinking behind the changes made to previous resources. You may find this webcast useful when working in a group setting or as an individual wishing to clarify your understanding.

This work is a reflection of the great collaborative work between Inclusive School and Community Services, and Curriculum and Instructional Services! Thanks to the many people who have been instrumental in putting together these incredible resources.

CYCLE OF ONGOING DIALOGUE FOR INVITING AND RESPONDING TO REQUESTS FOR RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS



Inclusive School and Community Services Update

[Inclusive School and Community Services](#) (ISCS) is now entering its third year in full operation! The ISCS Unit is made up of three multidisciplinary teams; the [Reception Centre](#), [Teacher Liaison](#) and [Community Resource Facilitator](#) teams. Each team provides specific supports and services for schools, students, staff, parents and/or community members. This includes supporting schools to become more inclusive as they work to champion the achievement and well-being of all students. As we work to support implementation of our 4 Board Theories of Action, we use a wide range of innovative approaches to meet the diverse needs of our school communities



We are pleased to welcome a number of new staff to the unit for the 2014-2015 school year. We welcome [Woonie Zeeman, Teacher Liaison \(TL\)](#) supporting our students of Chinese Heritage and [Erica Shin, TL](#) supporting our students of Korean Heritage, to the TL team. Woonie will be working with ISCS and International Education Services to support our Mandarin, Vietnamese and Cantonese speaking students and families. Our newest addition to the Reception Centre (RC) team is [Alice Sitt, Secondary Teacher Assessor](#). Alice will work alongside the RC team to support our newly arrived students to York Region transition smoothly into YRDSB schools across the region.

The ISCS staff has a wide range of specialized knowledge and skills designed to serve some of our most vulnerable students and families from a variety of school communities across the region. These services include assisting newcomer students and families; building and maintaining strong partnerships with parents, community, social service agencies, and community organizations which serves to ensure our Board is able to meet the Ministry of Education's new goal of [Ensuring Equity](#). These resources and services support our system-wide equity initiatives that foster inclusive environments that are respectful, accepting, supportive and welcoming for all! For more information please view the [ISCS Video](#) located on our page on the BWW.

The Road to Inclusivity

*The **Road to Inclusivity Project** is a grant-type program designed to encourage and support schools and other worksites with the development of locally based initiatives and implementation of the Board's Equity and Inclusivity Education Policy and Procedure # 261. The application form can be found on the Portal. Schools and departments can apply for this grant once every school year.*

Recipients of the grant are required to submit a summary report at the conclusion of the event and/or activity.

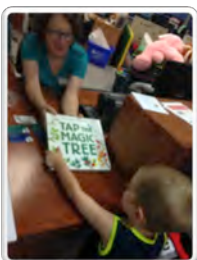
For further information please contact [Joan Lachhman](#) by email or at 905-884-2046 ext 252.

What's New at the Reception Centre!

[The Reception Centre \(RC\) team](#) works to ensure that our students new to Ontario have a smooth transition into the York Region District School Board and the Ontario school system. For this reason, the centre serves as the very first experience for students and families new to our school district. Due to the continued large numbers of students and families newly arriving to York Region, we continue to have two locations. This summer the Markham Reception Centre and our Richmond Hill satellite location welcomed approximately 850 students during the months of July and August.

The Reception Centre (RC) staff will be hosting an appreciation event on Thursday, October 30, 2014 at the Markham Welcome Centre. The purpose of the event is to share the many successes of the work of the Reception Centre with the summer staff. The months of July, August and September are a peak period at the Reception Centre. Thanks to the incredible collaboration of the summer staff and our community partners such as the Welcome Centre and School Settlement Education Partnership York Region, we are able to successfully transition many students into our school system and provide the appropriate supports to ensure that they have a smooth transition to their new school and community. This August our Teacher Assessors (Alice Sitt, Secondary and Shafiq Alibhai, Elementary, shared over approximately 750 initial language and math assessments with schools across the district. The purpose of the initial assessments is to support with the appropriate placement and programming of students in their home schools. If you have questions about your student's initial assessment, or require further information about the Reception Centre please visit the [Reception Centre page](#) on the BWW.

Building Blocks for Kindergarten! Great Start for Many!



This summer, York Region District School Board was teaming with activity. Our Board's commitment to student achievement, school readiness and parent engagement saw 42 **Building Blocks for Kindergarten (BBFK)** programs being offered to families with a child starting JK this September.

Key to the success of BBFK, a program delivered by teachers and early childhood educators, is building and supporting the relationship between parent and school -- a relationship that research shows is critical to a child's academic success. The Inclusive School and Community Services' Community Resource Facilitators (CRFs) understand the importance of this foundational relationship and worked collaboratively with community partners throughout the summer to provide a wide range of parent engagement opportunities.



While BBFK educators built the parent-school bond through day-to-day engagement with parents, CRFs facilitated events and activities that brought parents/guardians together as a group to share, learn and build community around the common task of supporting our youngest learners.



CRFs facilitated many opportunities for parent engagement across our diverse school communities. Speech and language presentations were open to all 42 BBFK programs and helped parents understand how best to support their child's development of language and reading. A partnership with First Book Canada saw over a thousand free, new books going to BBFK programs and students.



The CRFs work with community partners to develop unique parent engagement opportunities to address the specific needs of families in our diverse school communities. At some BBFK sites they hosted Parent Talk sessions where parents could share ideas and questions, and then learn how to access a range of community resources online. Other sites provided Chai and Chats and engaged parents in conversation about early learning in languages such as Tamil, Chinese and Urdu. Some BBFK sites offered Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) informally over coffee. As well, over 75 families activated new library cards in special public library outreach sessions.

Whatever the school community, whatever the parent/guardian need, Community Resource Facilitators worked with Summer Learning Teams, BBFK educators and community partners to provide a wide range of parent engagement opportunities to 778 families this July.

Summer Youth Leadership Program

During the first two weeks of July 2014, a group of female students in Grades 7 to 12 participated in a series of culturally responsive workshops with a focus on the South Asian Heritage. This unique opportunity was provided by the Inclusive School and Community Services unit, in collaboration with the Yellow Brick House and the Settlement and Education Partnership in York Region (SEPYR). This program was offered at Discovery and Ellen Fairclough Public Schools. The workshop topics included: self-esteem, healthy relationships, career planning, health and wellness. Over 50 girls engaged in activities that allowed them to express their thoughts and ask critical questions pertinent to their own social identity. To demonstrate their learning, students created posters and surveys for the local shelters to raise awareness about the importance of positive self-image.



The Importance of Home Language! Simplified Mandarin Classes at the SI

This summer, the Milliken Mills Summer Institute (SI) partnered with YRDSB International Languages to offer a six week half-day Simplified Mandarin language class to complement a half-day Summer Institute program.

It was a very successful program with 51 elementary students ranging from SK to Grade 8 participating. Ninety-nine per cent of registered students came from the east area of the Board and approximately 70 per cent of students were from the Milliken Mills community. Although many of the students were of Chinese heritage, many of the participating students did not speak the language fluently at home and/or it was their first experience learning an International language in a formal setting.



YRDSB offers 22 International Languages at 32 sites on weekday evenings and Saturday mornings during the school year. Providing simplified Mandarin as a Summer Institute site provided the opportunity for many students to access their mother tongue in addition to other students of various backgrounds, to experience learning Mandarin.

Multilingualism has positive effects on children's linguistic and educational development;

- When children continue to develop their abilities in two or more languages throughout their primary school years, they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively,
- The level of development of children's mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development (children's knowledge and skills transfer across languages from the mother tongue they have learned in the home to the school language),
- Students may feel more included when they see their identity reflected in the curriculum, therefore strengthening their sense of belonging,
- The International Languages Program helps all students to communicate more effectively with people of diverse backgrounds and builds language skills that they will be able to use locally, nationally and globally, giving them more opportunities to represent Canada in the global village,
- Research indicates that when students develop their first language and other languages, their overall intellectual functioning improves.

*International Languages Elementary (ILE) Program; www.edu.gov.on.ca
Jim Cummins, University of Toronto, 2009*

Plans are currently underway to offer additional International language programs with the Summer Institute in 2015.

Holocaust Education Week – November 2 – 8



The week of November 2-8, 2014 marks the 34rd annual Holocaust Education Week. The focus of this year's Holocaust Week is "*Collaboration*." This week has historically been to raise awareness and encourage remembrance of the atrocities perpetrated against the Jewish people during the Nazi regime. During this week we also want to acknowledge those who were also targeted by this regime as a result of their social identities. People of colour, the Roma (commonly referred to as Gypsies), people with physical disabilities, and those who identified as LGBTQ were also subjected to intolerance and persecution in Europe.

Each year schools in York Region are encouraged to participate in recognizing this week. Educators are asked to review the [Holocaust Education Week](#) memo distributed each year for additional information and resources to assist you in your planning.

Equity and Inclusivity Professional Learning Opportunities

From Intent to Action

On Friday October 17th school and workplace teams were invited to attend the fifth annual Equity Symposium focusing on **Building Inclusive Schools and Workplaces: From Intent to Action**. This half-day learning opportunity will support teams as they continue their journey to build equitable and inclusive schools and workplaces.

This year's keynote speaker is Dr. Jasmine Zine, Associate Professor of Sociology at Wilfrid Laurier University. Through her dynamic keynote address, Dr. Zine will assist participants in understanding how oppression is manifested in schools and workplaces, and how it is structured in society to affect students' achievement and well-being.

The video of Dr. Zine's address, her presentation along with the presentations from the workshops will be available on the [Equity Page](#) at the beginning of November to assist school and workplace teams in work and school improvement planning.



Addressing Poverty in the Classroom



On **Friday, October 24th**, ISCS will host a professional learning session entitled Addressing Poverty in the Classroom. This professional learning opportunity is designed to continue the learning for school teams that will have attended the Equity Symposium on Friday, October 17th. At the session, school teams will participate in a morning or afternoon session at Maple H.S. with guest speaker Dr. Paul Gorski, Associate Professor at George Mason University.

His research focuses on class, poverty, educational equity and social justice. Through his thought-provoking address, Dr. Gorski will engage school teams to explore a range of effective strategies for addressing poverty and classism in education, in addition to facilitating new levels of consciousness regarding diverse social identities. This session will assist participants in deepening their understanding of equity and inclusivity, how oppression is structured in society and how it impacts our schools and classrooms. School teams will also have an opportunity to work together to engage in school improvement planning and to review their challenge of practice as it pertains to equity and inclusivity.

Please log onto [Connect2Learn](#) to register for this half day symposium. Deadline for registration is **October 17, 2014**.

Equity & Inclusive Education

In the York Region District School Board we believe that Equity and Inclusive Education is the foundation for excellence.

Striving for equity and inclusivity requires that we work to meet individual needs, identify and eliminate barriers to success and promote a sense of belonging in all of our students.



Diversity is our strength, Equity our commitment, Inclusion our goal.

Please visit the [Equity Page](#) for additional information and links to a variety of resources.