GECDSB Employment Systems Review

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

JUNE 2023

a business imperative for school districts. Creating an inclusive organization is therefore no longer the "nice" thing to do but rather the smart thing to do in order to attract, retain, and benefit from the best talent and to create inclusive learning environments for students.

An inclusive organization does not come about by chance even in a country that welcomes and champions diversity. Instead, it requires the intentional and persistent effort of an organization. The journey to becoming an inclusive organization must be deliberately begun, boldly led, and constantly nurtured. It requires time, energy, commitment, tenacity, and the allocation of appropriate financial and human resources. It requires that the approach to building inclusivity be tailored to the organization, with the understanding that this is an ongoing organizational journey and not a one-time initiative.

Methodology for the Employment Systems Review

This report is the product of the consulting team's review and analysis of the GECDSB's employment policies and practices as well as employee perceptions and experiences. This ESR aims to identify and make recommendations for the elimination of systemic, cultural, and attitudinal barriers to a diverse workforce, equitable employment policies and practices, and an inclusive workplace.

While the consulting team was open to exploring any issue of equity that arose in the course of conducting the ESR, the research inquiry was focused on issues affecting the groups that have been identified as experiencing persistent and systemic discrimination in the labour market, namely Indigenous peoples, racialized people, persons with disabilities, women, and those who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ (referred to as "Indigenous peoples and the equity-seeking groups" in this report). While the report focuses on these groups, it is important to note that the removal of barriers to the hiring, advancement, and full inclusion of these groups also benefits all employees and offers advantages to the organization as a whole through improved productivity, effectiveness, and responsiveness to students and parents/guardians in the school community.

The ESR blends the analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data collected through the following methods:

> Review of employment policies, written procedures, and related documents

> Review of 33 files for competitions conducted between 2021 and 2022 to assess how policies are implemented and to identify informal practices

See Equality in Employment: A Royal Commission Report by Judge Rosalie Abella. Released in 1984, this landmark report recommended enactment of employment equity as a government intervention to address the magnitude of systemic discrimination faced by Indigenous peoples, racialized people, persons with disabilities, and women. Employees from the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities are also included in this ESR given the research that indicates that they also experience harassment and discrimination in employment.

Consultant-led focus groups in which 101 people participated

An online Workplace Equity and Inclusion Survey distributed to all employees via email, in which 2,947 employees participated

One-on-one interviews with 5 senior leaders and 4 union representatives, and

Consultant-led focus groups with Human Resources staff.

In total, over 3,000 employees participated in these consultations, representing about 67% of the Board's approximately 4,500 permanent and temporary employees. This ESR provides a high-level perspective of the Board's policies, practices, and organizational culture and their impact on employees.

The Journey Ahead: Key Priority Areas

In response to the issues and gaps identified through this review, recommendations are made throughout the report in four key priority areas.

Priority 1: Diversify the workforce at all levels

As was identified through the Staff Census, employees shared their concern that the Board's workforce does not reflect the diversity of its students. Participants shared that there are barriers to hiring, including hiring that is relationship based rather than merit based. This means that not only is the Board not hiring the best candidates, but relationship-based hiring continues to limit the diversity of the organization. In addition, employees shared their concern that relationships impact more than just hiring they also impact advancement opportunities and whether harassment and other inappropriate behaviours are addressed.

In addition, in order to advance efforts to diversify the workforce, those involved in the hiring process must be supported to recognize and mitigate their unconscious biases and understand the value that diversity brings to the workplace and to students. They must also be provided with the tools, resources, and policies to ensure that hiring is not based on who you know, but what you know.

Recommendations to diversify the workforce have been made in this report, including recommendations to:

Ensure that all resumes are fairly screened against the qualifications for the position

Revise the equity and accommodation statement

Ensure interview questions are free from gender and cultural biases and assess the candidates' skills and abilities for the job.

Priority 2: Create more equitable policies and practices

The review of employment policies and the hiring process identified several areas that need to be addressed to strengthen policies and practices as well as to ensure

compliance with the Ontario Human Rights Code and the AODA. The Board also needs to create equitable employment policies and processes that support the hiring, advancement, and full inclusion of a qualified and diverse workforce.

This report makes recommendations to ensure that employment policies and practices comply with equity-related legislation as well as recommendations to fill gaps in the Board's policy framework, including the following:

> Update a number of policies and procedures to ensure compliance with the Ontario Human Rights Code and AODA
>
> Remove gendered language from policies
>
> Develop new policies to address obligations to provide accommodation based on any human rights protected ground, create scent-free workplaces, and create policies to support gender identity and gender expression.

Priority 3: Create a more inclusive and welcoming work environment

Many Indigenous, Black, and racialized employees report that GECDSB workplaces are not always safe and welcoming environments. While they shared that there are barriers embedded in the organization's policies, they also pointed to an organizational culture and individual attitudes that are not welcoming and supportive their hiring, advancement, and full inclusion in the workplace. Many shared experiences of isolation and marginalization in the workplace and that they experience racism, harassment, and sexual harassment. Many shared being isolated and marginalized in the workplace and experiencing racism from their colleagues and the person they report to.

A number of women shared that they have experienced sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and a lack of accommodation for family care responsibilities. 2SLGBTQIA+ employees identified that it is not always safe to be open about their identities and that they experience homophobic and transphobic attitudes from their colleagues and the person they report to. Persons with disabilities described ableist attitudes from their colleagues and the person they report to, making it unsafe for them to disclose a disability and their need for accommodation. They also shared that they experience barriers to accessing accommodation when requested and barriers to accessing many of the GECDSB buildings.

Many employees shared that their complaints have been ignored or remain unaddressed by their principal, manager, and/or Human Resources. As such, these behaviours have been and continue to be condoned and therefore are allowed to continue. Employees also shared that they are afraid to report harassment or discrimination because of the reprisal they fear they will experience, which will further worsen their work environment and career opportunities.

While the majority of employees who participated in the ESR shared their support for the Board's equity efforts, there were also those who shared their misunderstanding

and resistance to equity. While not pervasive, the lack of understanding of and open hostility to equity puts the GECDSB at risk of successful human rights complaints from students, parents, and staff.

Recommendations to foster more welcoming and inclusive work environments and to address issues when they do arise have been made in this report, including recommendations to:

> Develop a leadership framework for the Board that centres equity, human rights, anti-racism, and anti-oppression

> All people leaders receive in-person mandatory human rights training on an annual basis to ensure that they are able to lead and foster a work environment that values and is inclusive of Indigenous peoples and members of the equity-seeking groups

> Support affinity groups/employee resource groups to create safe and inclusive spaces for Indigenous employees and those from the equity-seeking groups

> All Supervisory Officers learn about equity in leadership and receive individual coaching to support their ongoing development and deepen their ability to lead the Board's equity efforts and embed equity into all that the Board does.

Priority 4: Strengthen the organization's equity infrastructure

In order to fully operationalize its commitment to employment equity, diversity, and inclusion, the GECDSB needs to create the infrastructure that will embed equity within the Board's employment policies and practices, sustain ongoing training and educational opportunities, and enable appropriate responses when issues do arise. This investment will also help to increase momentum and support all employees to embed workplace equity, diversity, and inclusion in their day-to-day work so that employees see it as an add-in to their work instead of an add-on. Creating this infrastructure will allow the GECDSB to ensure that this work and the gains made are sustainable and create long-lasting change.

Recommendations to strengthen the organization's infrastructure include the following:

> Use the recommendations from this report to develop an Employment Equity Strategy and implementation plan that includes accountability measures

> That a Workplace Equity Manager be hired to work with Human Resources staff to implement the recommendations from this Employment Systems Review

> Appropriate financial and human resources be allocated to implement the Employment Equity Plan and lead the Board's employment equity efforts

> That the Board conduct another Staff Census and Employment Systems Review in 5 years to assess progress and develop a new Employment Equity Plan.