



Date of Issue: April 22, 2013

Effective: Until revoked or modified

Subject: DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING EQUITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION POLICIES IN ONTARIO SCHOOLS

Application: Directors of Education
Secretary/Treasurers of School Authorities
Superintendents
Principals of Elementary Schools
Principals of Secondary Schools
Principals of Provincial and Demonstration Schools

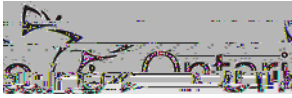
Reference: This memorandum replaces Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119, "Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools June 24 2009.

INTRODUCTION

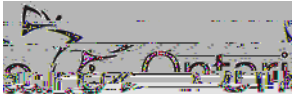
Ontario's publicly funded education system supports and reflects the democratic values of fairness, equity, and respect for all. Recognizing the importance of education, the Ontario government has established three core priorities:

- x high levels of student achievement
- x reduced gaps in student achievement
- x increased public confidence in publicly funded education

An equitable, inclusive education system is fundamental to achieving these core priorities, and is recognized internationally as critical to delivering a high quality education for all learners. Equity and excellence go hand in hand. ... In a truly equitable system, factors such as race, gender, and socio-economic status do not prevent students from achieving ambitious outcomes. Our experience shows that



On April 6, 2009, the Minister of Education released *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, hereafter referred to as "the strategy". This document sets out a vision for an equitable and inclusive education system. The action plan contained in the document focuses on respecting diversity, promoting inclusive education, and identifying and eliminating



groups of students continue to encounter discriminatory barriers to learning. Recent research shows that students who feel connected to teachers, to other students, and to the school itself do better academically.⁵

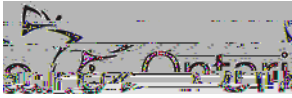
Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119 (2009) broadened the scope of No. 119 (1993) to take into account a wide range of equity factors, as well as all the prohibited grounds of discrimination under the Ontario Human Rights Code and other similar considerations. No. 119 (2009) fully supported and expanded on the principles of antiracism and ethnocultural equity that were outlined in No. 119 (1993), and did not reflect a weakened or reduced commitment to antiracism or ethnocultural equity. By promoting a systemwide approach to identifying and removing discriminatory biases and systemic barriers, it has helped ensure that all students feel welcomed and accepted in school life.

This memorandum brings No. 119 (2009) up to date so that it is in accordance with amendments to the Education Act; that is, school boards are now required to develop and implement an equity and inclusive education policy. This memorandum also updates No. 119 (2009) to reflect the fact that gender identity and gender expression are dimensions of diversity under the Ontario Human Rights Code.

REQUIREMENTS FOR BOARDS

All publicly funded school boards are required to develop, implement, and monitor an equity and inclusive education policy that includes a religious accommodation guideline, in accordance with the requirements set out in this memorandum and the strategy, and that complies with relevant legislation, including amendments to the Education Act.

The strategy is designed to promote fundamental human rights as described in the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, with which school boards are already



Framework, 2007. They should also consult with their legal counsel and Freedom of Information coordinators to ensure that they are fulfilling all their legal responsibilities.

The equity and inclusive education policy of a board must address the eight areas of focus outlined in this memorandum, and must include a guideline on religious accommodation and an implementation plan. During the cyclical process of reviewing and revising their policies, boards will take steps to align all their other policies and procedures (e.g., on safe and accepting schools, student discipline, staff hiring and development) with their equity and inclusive education policy. This process will help to ensure that the principles of equity and inclusive education are embedded in all aspects of board and school operations.

School board policies must be comprehensive and must cover the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in the Ontario Human Rights Code. The code prohibits discrimination on any of the following grounds: race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, citizenship, ethnic origin, disability, creed (religion), sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, family status, and marital status. Boards may also address related issues arising from the intersection of the dimensions of diversity that can also act as a systemic barrier to student learning

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Equity and inclusive education policies and implementation plans will be consistent with the guiding principles and goals set out in the strategy with the requirements in this memorandum, and with the revised ministry document entitled Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation, 2013 (hereafter referred to as “the guidelines”). These three documents should be used together when boards are reviewing and/or developing and implementing their equity and inclusive education policy, and when conducting their cyclical reviews of all their other policies.

When reviewing or developing their equity and inclusive education policy, boards are expected to consult widely with students, parents, principals, teachers and other staff, school councils, their Special Education Advisory Committee, their Parent Involvement Committee and other committees (e.g., Diversity Committee; First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Advisory Committee), federations and unions, service organizations, and community partners in order to reflect the diversity of the community.



Areas of Focus

The three goals of the equity and inclusive education strategy are as follows:

- x shared and committed leadership by the ministry, boards, and schools to eliminate discrimination through the identification and removal of biases and barriers
- x equity and inclusive education policies and practices support positive learning environments that are respectful and welcoming to all
- x accountability and transparency with ongoing progress demonstrated and communicated to the ministry and the community

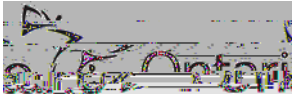
In order to achieve these goals, each school board policy on equity and inclusive education will cover the following eight areas of focus.

1. Board policies, programs, guidelines, and practices

Through cyclical policy reviews, boards will embed the principles of equity and inclusive education in all their other policies, programs, guidelines, and practices, so that an equity and inclusive education focus is an integral part of every board's operations and permeates everything that happens in its schools.

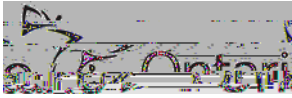
Boards should make every effort to identify and remove discriminatory biases and systemic barriers that may limit the opportunities of individuals from diverse communities for employment, mentoring, retention, promotion, and succession planning in all board and school positions. The board's work force should reflect the diversity within the community so that students, parents, and community members are able to see themselves represented. The board's work force should also be capable of understanding and responding to the experiences of these communities within the board's jurisdiction.

Boards and schools should ensure that all students have the opportunity to learn and achieve at high levels.



3. School–community relationships

Schools and boards will continue building their capacity – with the active engagement of parents and school community partners – to create and sustain a positive school climate that supports student achievement and wellbeing.



APPENDIX: DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are included for the purposes of this policy/program memorandum only.

Diversity: