

AGENDA: 6:15 p.m.

REVISED

1. Call to Order/Roll Call
2. HWDSB Land Acknowledgement
3. Approval of the Agenda

Delegations

- a. Carolyn Proulx-Wootton & Sharon Harker re: SAGE Quest – Parent Perspective
 - b. Michelle Poirier re: SAGE/SAGE Quest and Guiding Principles
 - c. Sarah Milmine, Parent, Director of Children's Clinical Programs at Now What? Support Services re: SAGE Program Review
 - d. Lisa Wong re: Elementary and Secondary FI Program Review & Recommendations
 - e. Laura Mulder re: Draft Guiding Principles – Program Review Strategy
 - f. Brian Pohlman re: Malatest Survey regarding French Immersion
4. Review of the Committee Workplan
 5. Draft Guiding Principles – Program Review Strategy
 6. Caring and Safe Schools Action Plan, 2024-2027 Update
 7. Suspension & Expulsion data, 2024-2025
-
8. Adjournment

**Revised agenda to reflect delegations*



PROGRAM COMMITTEE

February 19, 2026

Draft Guiding Principles to Respond to the Recommendations of the Program Strategy Review

Submitted By: Sheryl Robinson Petrazzini, Director of Education

Prepared By: Jamie Nunn, Associate Director, School Improvement, Learning Services
Michelle Lemaire, Superintendent of Program, Equity and Innovation

Recommendation:

That the Draft Guiding Principles to respond to the review of the Elementary Program Strategy, Secondary Programs Strategy and the French Immersion Location Strategy and Application Process be approved.

Background:

Over the past year, a consultant conducted a comprehensive review of HWDSB's Elementary Program Strategy, Secondary Program Strategy and the Elementary French Immersion Location Strategy and Application Process. Their [final report](#) was presented to the Program Committee on December 11, 2025, and received by the Board of Trustees on February 2, 2026.

The consultant summarized 10 key findings and 27 recommendations aimed at improving HWDSB's Elementary Focus Programs (6 recommendations), Secondary Program Strategy (15 recommendations) and French Immersion Program (6 recommendations). As noted in the report, many of the recommendations could lead to significant changes for some students, staff, and families, if approved and implemented. While the consultant did not identify timelines for adopting the recommendations, the consultant emphasized the importance of a phased approach and extensive engagement with affected communities, based on the experiences of other school boards undertaking similar work. Staff will require time to develop an action plan to review, modify or implement the recommendations in a strategic manner that best supports students' needs.

As part of the December Committee discussion, the development of Guiding Principles were identified as an important next step.

Status:

Staff have developed the requested Draft Guiding Principles ([Appendix A](#)) to provide a consistent framework for responding to the recommendations from the Program Strategy Review. These principles support HWDSB’s five pillars of the Multi-Year Strategic Plan and goals, ensuring a comprehensive approach to responding to the Program Strategy recommendations. Joy, Trust, Compassion, and Dignity continue to be HWDSB’s core Values that underpin each guiding principle and guide the process of program development and review.

Next Steps

Staff propose the following timelines:

Date	Next Steps
February 19, 2026	Program Committee reviews, discusses and finalizes the Draft Guiding Principles and makes recommendations to Board for approval.
Between March and May 2026	Based on final approval of the Guiding Principles, staff would use the guiding principles to evaluate the recommendations.
May 21, 2026	Program Committee considers a staff report on the proposed implementation of the recommendations, beginning in the 2027-2028 school year.

Financial Implications:

There are no financial implications to this report. Fiscal responsibility and sustainability are one of the seven Draft Guiding Principles.

Strategic Directions:

Upholding Human Rights, Safety & Well-Being

We will support all students and staff to feel safe and secure in our classrooms and school communities.

Providing Equitable Quality Education

We will offer equitable quality educational opportunities to improve student engagement, learning and achievement for future-readiness.

Collaborating with Students, Families & Communities

We will build reciprocal relationships and partnerships to enhance access and engagement for students, families, and communities.

Building a Sustainable Education System

We will adapt to a rapidly changing world through responsible fiscal management, investing equitably in accessible and sustainable facilities, and supporting a robust workforce.

Reinforcing Indigenous Educational Wellness & Reconciliation

We will honour our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation by nurturing respectful and reciprocal relationships among Indigenous Peoples and Treaty Partners, and by cultivating intergenerational healing and wellness in a restorative education system.

Responding to the Recommendations from the Program Strategy Review of the Elementary Program Strategy, Secondary Program Strategy & Elementary French Immersion Location Strategy and Application Process

Principles for 2040: Designing Today for Tomorrow's Students

The Draft Guiding Principles listed below are intended to provide a consistent framework for responding to the recommendations from the 2025 Program Strategy Review of the Elementary Program Strategy, Secondary Program Strategy and Elementary French Immersion Location Strategy and Application Process.

These principles support HWDSB's five pillars of the Multi-Year Strategic Plan and goals of the Board Improvement Plan, ensuring a comprehensive approach to actioning the review. As we look ahead, we consider the students who will enter Kindergarten this upcoming school year and will graduate in 2040. Joy, Trust, Compassion, and Dignity continue to be HWDSB's core Values that underpin each Guiding Principle, guiding the process of program development and review for the graduating class of 2040.

1. Student Achievement and Well-Being

Students will engage in dynamic, inclusive learning that fosters achievement, well-being, and joy in learning. All programs will support diverse pathways and enhance the overall student experience in every HWDSB classroom.

2. Continuous Improvement and Alignment with Student Outcomes

Program offerings will directly support the [HWDSB Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#) and [Board Improvement Plan](#) priorities in literacy, numeracy, and future preparedness. Programs will be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect student voice, post-secondary options, and local workforce and community needs.

3. Evidence-Informed Decision Making

Program decisions will be guided by evidence. We will use qualitative and quantitative data to monitor outcomes, inform improvements, and ensure resources are distributed equitably to meet the diverse needs of HWDSB students.

Ethical Indigenous education research will be conducted in partnership with local Indigenous communities, ensuring reciprocity, accountability, and full respect for Indigenous data sovereignty (OCAP).

4. Equity of Access

Programs will be designed, reviewed and distributed to reduce barriers and inequities in access and participation. Geographic and demographic considerations will ensure all students have equitable access.

5. Fiscal Responsibility and Sustainability

All program decisions will be evaluated for long-term viability, fiscal sustainability, responsible and equitable use of resources. Programs with high costs or low enrolment will be reviewed regularly. New initiatives will be piloted with clear cost-benefit analysis.

6. Inclusive Community Engagement and Lived Experience

Program decisions will promote inclusive, safe, and supportive learning environments where every student experiences belonging and meaningful opportunities.

Transparent engagement processes will ensure student, parent, staff, and community voices are sought to inform program creation, expansion, and closure.

7. Phased and Communicated Implementation

Implementation will prioritize listening to voices that have not historically been centered and addressing barriers to engagement. Clear, accessible communication will keep families and staff informed about programs, processes, and changes.

Implementation plans will be phased, strategic, and responsive, prioritizing urgent equity and sustainability needs while minimizing disruption to student learning.



Program Committee Report

February 19, 2026

Caring and Safe Schools Action Plan, 2024-2027 Update

Submitted By: Sheryl Robinson Petrazzini, Director of Education

Prepared By: Jamie Nunn, Associate Director, School Improvement, Learning Services
Gerry Smith, Superintendent, Safe, Compassionate, and Equitable Schools, K-12
Jason Rizza, System Principal, Caring and Safe Schools

Recommendation:

That the Caring and Safe Schools Action Plan, 2024-2027 be received.

Background:

HWDSB adopted a [Caring and Safe Schools Action Plan 2024-2027](#) in spring 2025 to prioritize identity, equity, and human rights as key elements to create safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments. Guided by HWDSB's [Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#), this Action Plan also integrates the [Human Rights and Equity Action Plan 2023-2027](#), [Special Education Action Plan 2024-2025](#), [Mental Health and Addiction Strategy 2024-2027](#), and [Indigenous Education Circle Action Plan 2021-2025](#), creating a collective support system rooted in strong, collaborative relationships. By fostering shared responsibility across these initiatives, we aim to build positive school climate that nurtures every student's well-being and potential. Through collaborative efforts, HWDSB strives to fulfil its Vision which is to ensure that every student experiences a sense of belonging and engages in dynamic, inclusive learning environments that empower them to thrive, reach their full potential, and build their own future.

The goals of the Caring and Safe Schools Action Plan, 2024-2027 plan are:

- We will foster positive, inclusive environments where student identity, voice, and relationships are prioritized, ensuring every student feels valued and empowered to succeed.
- We commit to maintaining a safe and secure environment for students, families, and caregivers with transparent communication and collaborative approaches to addressing safety concerns.

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- We will amplify student and family voices in decision-making, creating inclusive structures that reflect the needs and experiences of the entire school community.

The Action Plan has five key priorities with a corresponding action and commitments:

- Creating the Conditions for Learning
- Identity Affirming Curriculum, Teaching Practices and Learning Environments
- Responding to Student Need
- Secure Schools Awareness and Response
- Accountability and Transparency

We monitor the impact of the Caring and Safe Schools Action Plan at the school, classroom, and system level. Staff will report further on the impact of this Action Plan to the Board of Trustees through two forthcoming reports on the implementation of [Board Improvement Plan 2025-2026](#) Goals 1–3 in March 2026 and Goals 4-5 in May 2026.

Update

During the 2025–2026 school year, work across the system continues to advance the priorities and actions identified for the 2025–2026 implementation year of the Caring and Safe Schools Action Plan, 2024–2027. Actions implemented during this school year align with the annual work plan developed to support the five priority areas of the Caring and Safe Schools Action Plan and reflect ongoing system responsiveness to emerging needs. We use a variety of metrics to monitor our student experiences including the Healthy Peer Relation Study (school climate data), Grade 12 Exit Survey, and EQAO questionnaires in addition to student voice gathered at the classroom and school level.

Creating the Conditions for Learning

This area focusses on student-centered learning environments where identity, voice and lived experience are affirmed and honoured, contributing to safety and the development of trust and understanding. Actions we have taken include:

- **A consistent focus on prevention, early intervention, and proactive communication.** School climate (Healthy Peer Relations) study results from the 2023–2024 and 2024–2025 school years demonstrate improvement in several student-reported measures. For example, a greater proportion of students reported feeling welcome at school, experiencing a sense of belonging, and feeling accepted by peers. Improvements were also observed in student perceptions of safety in common school spaces and confidence that there are adults at school who care about their well-being.
- **Implementation of the HWDSB Anti-Black Racism Strategy.** Schools began the implementation of this strategy by delving into the teaching and learning strategies to best support Black students. For example, there has been an increase in school-based Black Student Associations (BSA), and an increase in the request for the support of System

Equity and Well-Being Consultants to support the co-development of culturally responsive environments to best support their Black student populations to experience success.

- **Develop effective partnerships with the community.** For example, HWDSB and Hamilton Health Sciences (HHS), in partnership with their Black Health Equity Specialist, have begun a partnership that will enable Black students to seek coop and work experiences with HHS. This evolving partnership will strength our ability to support the future goals and aspirations of Black students in our school board.

Identity Affirming Curriculum, Teaching Practices and Learning Environments

This area focuses on creating inclusive, identity-affirming classrooms where students see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their learning experiences, and their pathways. Identity-affirming environments contribute to stronger relationships, increased engagement, and a greater sense of belonging, all of which are associated with improved attendance, reduced behavioural incidents, and stronger academic outcomes. Measures of student connection, belonging, and pathway readiness are used to monitor progress in this area and to inform responsive teaching and support strategies.

All three system actions in this area are underway, with a focus on culturally responsive teaching, inclusive learning environments, and student pathway planning. Actions we have taken include:

- **Continuously updating professional learning and system resources.** For example, in cross departmental work with the Indigenous Education Department, culturally responsive practice affirms Indigenous perspectives, including Two-Spirit identities, through relationship, respect, and reconciliation. For example, using HWDSB's Runner Model, schools connect students, educators, and community knowledge holders to provide responsive support for Indigenous learning in our schools.
- **Ensured HWDSB supports identity-affirming culturally relevant resources are provided to students.** Consultation and ongoing work with interdepartmental staff support efforts to plan for culturally appropriate educational experiences that meet HWDSB guidelines when considering guest speakers and community members who are contributing to student learning in our schools.
- **Developed identity-affirming spaces for Black identifying females.** Through the work of our Graduation Coaches for Black Students Program, a focus on leadership and wellness, together with a community partner (HHS), provide a space and a plan for a series of ongoing learning and connection sessions for Black female-identifying students, Gr. 9-12, to extend their learning.

Responding to Student Need

This area focuses on ensuring that student behaviour and well-being concerns are addressed through equitable, responsive, and restorative approaches. Three of four system actions are

underway, including administrator learning, collaborative data review, and expanded supports for students requiring additional assistance. Actions we have taken include:

- **Developed a new setting in Alternative Education.** In direct response to student need, the Sir Isaac Brock Transitions class launched in the Fall of 2025. This alternate site supports both the learning and well-being of students who require additional support when transitioning between programs, or into a new school setting. Students in this class benefit from wraparound support drawing on system resources from many different departments when needed.
- **Redesigned existing roles to adapt to student needs.** The Child and Youth Counsellor Practitioner (CYCP) role has been redesigned to strengthen student transitions between schools, programs, and learning environments. CYCPs support entry and exit planning by collaborating with students, families, educators, administrators, and community supports to share effective strategies, reinforce relationship-based practices, and support a positive start in new settings. The intent of this approach is to reduce disruption during transitions and support student well-being, engagement, and sense of belonging.

Secure Schools Awareness and Response

This area focuses on maintaining safe, predictable, and supportive learning environments through consistent safety procedures and responsive leadership. All three actions identified in this area are underway, with a continued focus on preparedness, communication, and consistent response practices. Actions we have taken include:

- **System participation in Secure Schools Safety Awareness Month** has reinforced awareness of emergency procedures across all schools. School administrator participation has improved process clarity and provided forums that foster ongoing collaboration and problem-solving.
- **Ongoing principal and vice-principal learning sessions have focused on incident response, documentation, and trauma-informed leadership.** For example, site specific problem-solving has produced solutions that have been applied to improve and strengthen existing safety practices.
- **Improved communication to support student awareness.** System and school-based efforts were improved to provide timely information to students and families to best support our focus on safety and wellbeing in our school environments.

Accountability and Transparency

This work focuses on building trust across the system through consistent reporting, clear communication, and alignment of policies and procedures. Transparent processes and consistent application of progressive discipline practices help ensure that students, families, and staff understand expectations and feel confident in school responses. All three system actions in this

area are underway, with a focus on reporting practices, policy alignment, and community engagement.

- **Improved access to data to inform planning and support implementation.** In the Fall of 2025, improvements to our HWDSB data systems have provided school administrators with improved access to suspension and expulsion data, student perception data, and school environment-related data. Schools are better equipped through the school improvement process to make decisions that support the creation of conditions that support the safety and wellbeing for specific student populations.
- **Prioritized our work with community partners.** HWDSB continues to work in partnership with community organizations. In the Fall of 2025, HWDSB supported the development (and sent several delegates) to support a Youth Violence Summit hosted by the City of Hamilton. As an active member of the Community Safety and Well-Being Table Advisory, hosted by the City of Hamilton, HWDSB regularly provides advice and support city-wide initiatives that support student safety and well-being throughout the region.

Financial Implications:

The Caring and Safe Schools Action Plan 2024-2027 is funded through both Core Education Funding and Responsive Education Program (REP). The implementation of this plan is within the budget previously approved by the Board of Trustees in June 2025.

Strategic Directions:

Upholding Human Rights, Safety & Well-Being

We will support all students and staff to feel safe and secure in our classrooms and school communities.

Providing Equitable Quality Education

We will offer equitable quality educational opportunities to improve student engagement, learning and achievement for future-readiness.

Collaborating with Students, Families & Communities

We will build reciprocal relationships and partnerships to enhance access and engagement for students, families, and communities.

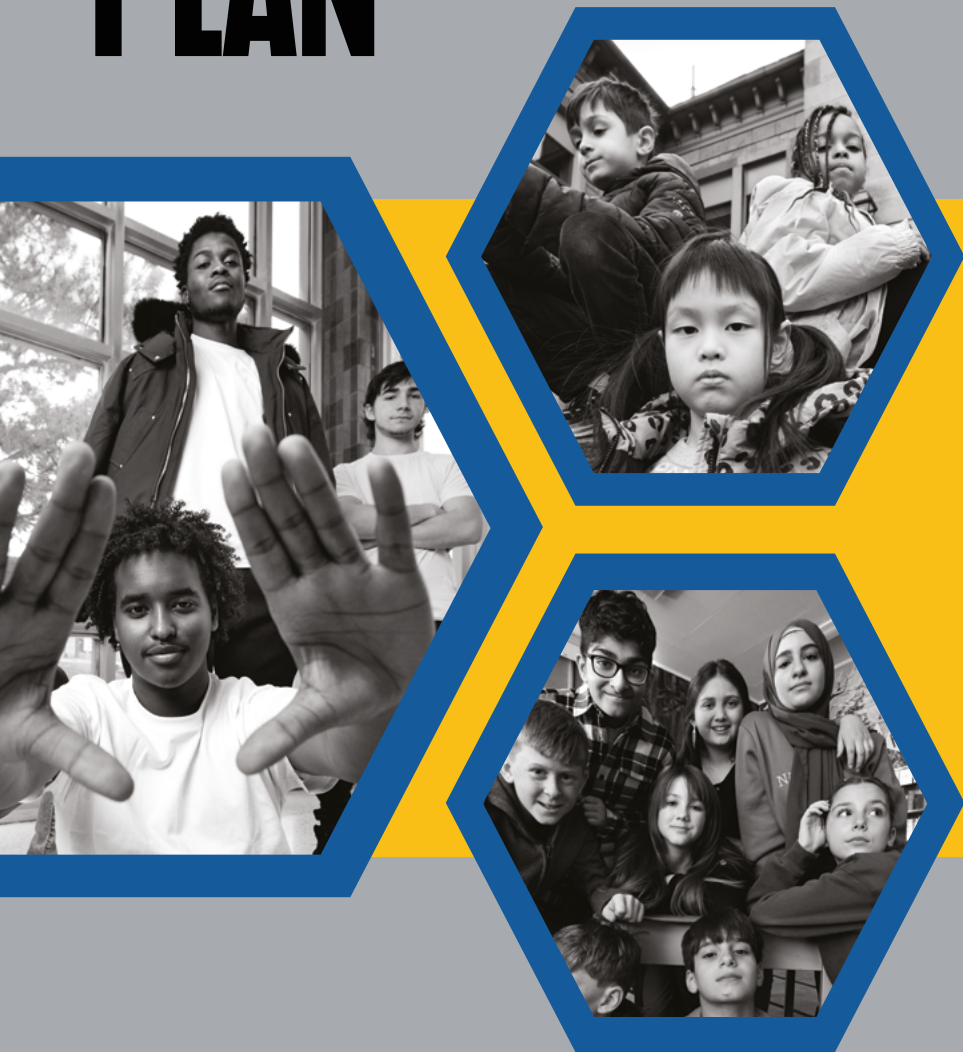
Building a Sustainable Education System

We will adapt to a rapidly changing world through responsible fiscal management, investing equitably in accessible and sustainable facilities, and supporting a robust workforce.

Reinforcing Indigenous Educational Wellness & Reconciliation

We will honour our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation by nurturing respectful and reciprocal relationships among Indigenous Peoples and Treaty Partners, and by cultivating intergenerational healing and wellness in a restorative education system.

2024-2027 CARING & SAFE SCHOOLS ACTION PLAN



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CARING AND SAFE SCHOOLS ACTION PLAN: A HOLISTIC APPROACH8

HWDSB's **2024-2027 Caring and Safe Schools Action Plan** commits to fostering a positive, inclusive, and supportive educational environment where student identity and voice are centered, relationships are nurtured, and safety and well-being are prioritized. HWDSB is dedicated to transparent communication and accountability in decision-making, ensuring that all students and families feel safe, secure, valued, and supported. Through active involvement, HWDSB aims to create and support environments where every voice is heard and listened to.

HWDSB's Mission Statement:

"Every student experiences a sense of belonging and engages in dynamic learning to reach their potential and build their own future." ([HWDSB 2023-2028 Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#)).

HWDSB's Values:

<p>Compassion:</p> <p>Leading with peace, friendship and love creates space for compassionate accountability, where we are responsible to one another in creating a culture of care.</p>	<p>Dignity:</p> <p>Reciprocity, anti-racism and anti-oppression lead to a just and equitable learning community, where every person is included, respected and valued.</p>
<p>Trust:</p> <p>Humility and transparency build the trusted relationships, connections and education system necessary for growth, change and evolution.</p>	<p>Joy:</p> <p>Curiosity, play and fun are catalysts for meaningful student learning outcomes and support joyful and enriching experiences.</p>

Guiding Principles:

The following principles guide HWDSB's work in implementing **the Caring and Safe Schools Action Plan** by having a shared understanding of the work and its application to our mission:

- We honour local Indigenous knowledge and practices, recognizing that cultural disconnection has adversely affected community wellness and healing across generations.
- We prioritize safety and care for all, deeply valuing the well-being of every individual in our educational community.
- We commit to ethical consultation and collaboration, actively engaging with students, families, staff, and the community to create a supportive environment.
- We intentionally seek input from individuals and communities historically underserved by the education system, acknowledging our responsibility to learn from their experiences.

Guiding Principles continued:

- We openly share our engagement processes with students, families, staff, and the community, as we believe in nurturing trusting relationships founded on transparency.
- We embrace a consensus-building approach to decision-making, ensuring that every voice is heard, valued, and honoured within our community.
- Our work is dedicated to benefiting students, families, staff, and the community, respecting and promoting self-determination at all levels.
- We strive to communicate in accessible language, ensuring that our messages resonate with and are understood by everyone in our community.

Impacts when Students Feel Safe and Secure:

- **Engaged School Communities:** School communities actively participate in practices that establish and sustain safe, equitable, and inclusive classrooms, fostering a secure environment for all students.
- **Amplified Voices:** Students from historically marginalized communities feel safe to share their perspectives, promoting collaboration and inclusivity among students, staff, families, and the community.
- **Profound Sense of Belonging:** Students feel safe to explore their identities, experiencing acceptance and honour that fosters a deep sense of belonging and authenticity.
- **Connected Relationships:** Students build secure and meaningful connections with responsive adults and peers, which enhances their learning experience through nurturing relationships.
- **Recognition of Value:** Students feel that they matter and are valued within their school community, receiving the support and attention necessary for their health and wellness.
- **De-stigmatized Mental Health Conversations:** Conversations about mental health are encouraged and normalized, creating a safe space for understanding and support among students.



GOALS: 2024-2027 CARING AND SAFE SCHOOLS ACTION PLAN

- We will foster positive, inclusive environments where student identity, voice, and relationships are prioritized, ensuring every student feels valued and empowered to succeed.
- We commit to maintaining a safe and secure environment for students, families, and caregivers with transparent communication and collaborative approaches to addressing safety concerns.
- We will amplify student and family voices in decision-making, creating inclusive structures that reflect the needs and experiences of the entire school community.

2024-2027 Caring and Safe Schools Action Plan:

This section provides an overview of the key objectives and actions at the system and school levels under the following five priority areas and commitments:

- Creating the Conditions for Learning
- Identity Affirming Curriculum and Teaching Practices and Learning Environments
- Responding to Student Need
- Secure Schools Awareness and Response
- Accountability and Transparency

Creating a nurturing and secure environment is essential for fostering well-being and enabling every student to thrive within our school communities. A sense of safety and belonging shapes how students learn, interact, and develop. It is vital to recognize and address the systemic barriers that can impact students' experiences, ensuring that every individual has the resources they need to succeed.

Implementing an identity-affirming curriculum and inclusive teaching practices fosters a sense of belonging, allowing students to feel valued and engaged in their learning journeys. Every student's experience is unique and influenced by their diverse identities, including age, race, gender identity, socioeconomic status, and ability. Embracing these identities helps create an environment where everyone feels respected and understood.

By actively responding to the needs of students and promoting a culture of safety within schools, we cultivate a supportive atmosphere where all individuals feel secure and empowered. Our commitment to accountability and transparency ensures that our actions are continuously assessed and refined, leading to an equitable and caring educational experience for everyone.

1. Creating the Necessary Conditions for Learning

Objective:

To create student-centred learning environments where identity, voice and lived experience are affirmed and honoured, contributing to safety and the development of positive, caring and respectful relationships.

Actions:

- Establish regular opportunities for students to share their voices and lived experiences through discussions, forums, or focus groups, fostering an environment of trust and understanding.
- Encourage cooperative learning activities that build community and mutual respect, helping students develop positive relationships with their peers.
- Recognize and implement strategies to mitigate disproportionalities and inequities observed in student achievement, attendance, disciplinary actions, and well-being, aiming to foster a more equitable learning environment for all students.
- Ensure access to resources and support systems that address students' emotional and social needs, reinforcing their sense of safety and belonging within the school community.

2. Identity Affirming Curriculum and Teaching Practices and Learning Environments

Objective:

To create identity-affirming curricula and learning environments that ensure every student feels safe and secure. By celebrating diverse backgrounds and voices, we foster a culture of belonging and positive relationships, prioritizing students' well-being and success in a supportive learning environment.

Actions:

- Enhance inclusivity and cultural relevance across teaching, curriculum, assessment, and resources to ensure responsiveness to diverse student needs and backgrounds.
- Design and implement a curriculum that reflects diverse identities and cultures, allowing students to see themselves represented in their learning materials.
- Involve students and families in the planning and decision-making process regarding educational pathways that provide diverse pathway options, ensuring every student has opportunities to achieve success and fulfillment in their educational journey.

3. Responding to Student Need

Objective:

To foster a responsive educational environment that meets diverse student needs through bias-free progressive discipline, ensuring that all students feel safe, respected and supported.

Actions:

- Provide role -embedded learning for all staff on recognizing and addressing implicit bias, and systemic racism, and how these factors influence student discipline.
- Involve student voice in the development and revision of school policies related to discipline, ensuring they reflect the lived experiences and needs of diverse student populations.
- Expand and further develop anti-bullying resources that are informed by student voice, and foster and strengthen compassion, dignity, trust and joy for every student.
- Develop clear, consistent communication mechanisms that allow students and caregivers/families to report safety concerns, biases, or other needs. This should include anonymous reporting options and appropriate follow-up support(s).

4. Secure Schools Awareness and Response

Objective:

Ensuring that school emergency procedures, including evacuation, hold and secure, shelter in place, lockdown, and bomb threat protocols, are communicated and practiced for student safety and security.

Actions:

- Develop and maintain a clear reporting system to transparently communicate the implementation of secure school procedures and emergency readiness, using comprehensive data collection to assess safety outcomes, support inclusive practices, and enhance preparedness across all HWDSB sites.
- Provide regular progress updates on the organization's website and at board meetings to ensure accessible information on both equity initiatives and emergency preparedness for all HWDSB community members.
- Actively seek feedback from students, staff, and families on safety, inclusivity, and emergency protocols to guide future planning and enhance accountability and effectiveness in creating secure, inclusive learning environments.

5. Accountability and Transparency

Objective:

To consistently evaluate and adapt our Caring and Safe Schools commitments, using auditing tools to assess secure environments, identity-affirming practices, and inclusive responses. We will remain accountable to our community by transparently communicating progress and evolving with the educational landscape and student needs.

Actions:

- Conduct regular audits of secure schools practices and inclusive environment initiatives, using findings to refine policies and practices. This continuous assessment ensures our response evolves alongside the needs and experiences of our students, staff, and community.
- Provide accessible, periodic updates on the implementation of Caring and Safe Schools initiatives, including secure schools protocols. By sharing this information through multiple channels, we foster transparency, trust, and accountability across the community.
- Actively invite and incorporate feedback from students, families, and staff on safety and inclusion practices, using these insights to shape future planning and decision-making.

Caring and Safe Schools Action Plan: A Holistic Approach

HWDSB's continuous and ongoing commitment to creating a caring and safe learning and work environment is linked to the work of all departments in the organization, including:

- [HWDSB's Mental Health and Addictions Strategy](#)
- [Equity Action Plan](#)
- [Indigenous Education Circle Strategic Action Plan](#)
- [Special Education Action Plan](#)

Braided together, these initiatives promote a holistic approach to student well-being, ensuring every student feels valued and supported. We recognize that collaboration can create a cohesive framework that fosters safety, belonging, and equitable outcomes for every student.

HAMILTON

WENTWORTH
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

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HWDSB



PROGRAM COMMITTEE REPORT

February 19, 2026

2024-2025 Student Suspension and Expulsion Data

Submitted By: Sheryl Robinson Petrazzini, Director of Education

Prepared By: Jamie Nunn, Associate Director, School Improvement, Learning Services
Gerry Smith, Superintendent, Safe, Compassionate, and Equitable Schools, K-12
Sally Landon, Manager, Research and Analytics

Recommendation:

That the 2024-2025 Suspension and Expulsion report be received.

Background:

The [Education Amendment Act \(Keeping Our Kids Safe at School\)](#) came into effect in February 2010, amending Part XIII of the Education Act dealing with behaviour discipline, and safety. In 2012 the [Accepting Schools Act \(Bill 13\)](#) re-established the goal of promoting a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting of all pupils and promotes the prevention of bullying. PPM 145: [Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour](#) was also revised to provide further direction to school boards whereby: *“When inappropriate student behaviour occurs, school staff consider individual circumstances and different options to determine the most appropriate way to respond to each situation and help students learn from their choices. School staff use a progressive approach to discipline that includes early and ongoing interventions to promote positive student behaviour. In some cases, it may be necessary to suspend or expel a student”*. Ministry legislation as outlined above forms the basis of HWDSB’s current [Student Behaviour and Discipline Policy](#) and [Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour Procedure](#) and [Suspension, Expulsion and Programs for Long-Term Suspended or Expelled Students Procedure](#). A revised Student Behaviour and Bias-Free Progressive Discipline Policy is forthcoming this month for Board approval which will result in the need to revise both operational procedures for staff.

After the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB) Board of Trustees approved the [Multi-Year Strategic Plan](#) (MYSP) 2023-2028, it was launched on January 17, 2024. The pillars of the MYSP helped to inform the creation of our [Board Improvement Plan](#) (BIP) which specifically identifies five important goals for students. Two of the goals are: 1) increase engagement for every student and 2) improve well-being for every student. Reducing the number of days

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students are absent from school or suspended from school is critically important to realizing our commitment to improving student achievement, sense of belonging and well-being.

Status:

Monitoring and responding to student suspension and expulsion data is critical. The following report summarizes HWDSB suspension and expulsion data for the 2024-2025 school year ([Appendix A](#)).

Suspensions

In the 2024-2025 school year, the total number of suspension incidents decreased relative to the previous year (Table 1). Of the students registered in 2024-2025 school year, HWDSB registered a 6.4% rate of suspension (Table 2a). Our data indicates a continued trend that consistently displays a lower number of reported suspensions compared to the number of investigations in both the elementary and secondary panels (Table 2b).

Staff observe a noted increase in the number of suspensions by exceptional status (Table 7). Specifically, students identified with a learning disability, Autism, and mild intellectual disability were suspended at a higher rate than in previous school years.

It is important to review suspension data by grade. 2024-2025 suspension data shows an increase in grade-specific suspensions, when compared to 2023-24, specifically in grade 10 and grade 11. Grade 7, 8 and grade 9 showed a decrease in suspensions when compared to the data from the previous school year.

Expulsions

In the 2024-2025 school year, HWDSB completed 277 investigations resulting in 44 expulsions board-wide. When compared to 2023-2024, this represents an increase in the overall number of expulsions (Table 9).

Over the past five years, expulsions have fluctuated but show an overall downward trend, declining from 54 in 2019–2020 to 44 in 2024–2025. This decrease can in part be attributed to the successful implementation of progressive discipline practices, as well as supportive interventions aimed at creating the conditions necessary for learning and building more inclusive school and classroom environments. While the overall trend is downward, the current number of expulsions highlights the ongoing need for preventative measures, restorative practices, and student engagement strategies, consistent with HWDSB's [Caring and Safe Schools Action Plan 2024-2027](#), which emphasizes inclusive school cultures, proactive supports, and early intervention to reduce incidents that lead to expulsions.

Prevention / Intervention / Responding

Our commitment to compassionate, caring and safe schools remains a priority as we work to support staff, students, and school communities to thrive in HWDSB. Consistent with the Board Improvement Plan goals of increasing engagement and improving well-being for every student,

we continue to strengthen prevention, early intervention, and responsive practices that reduce reliance on exclusionary discipline and support positive learning environments.

Since the last Board report, the following actions have supported this work:

- Continued support for school principals and vice-principals in the consistent application of bias-free progressive discipline with an emphasis on restorative, preventative, and instructional responses before exclusionary consequences.
- Continued system-wide professional learning grounded in human rights, anti-racism, anti-oppression, and identity-affirming practices. Currently in our second year, 30 elementary and secondary school teams are engaged in a Critical Consciousness Practitioner's Inquiry focused on disrupting anti-Black racism. This work is supported through ongoing training in bias-free progressive discipline to promote consistent and equitable decision-making across schools.
- Continue to work in collaboration with the Special Education division to review student discipline matters to understand how mitigating circumstances need to be considered when student behaviour may lead to a suspension from school.
- Continued implementation of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy and identity-affirming classroom practices. Resources such as Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild. and Reimagining Wellness continue to support inclusive learning environments and relationship-based approaches.
- Expansion of targeted and wraparound student supports, including the extension of the Graduation Coach for Black Students program to additional secondary schools and expanded access to the YMCA Alternative Suspension Program for students in Grades 6 to 9 across all schools.
- Strengthened early identification and intervention using school climate data, incident reporting, attendance monitoring, and school-level reviews.

Together, these actions support the continued decrease in suspension incidents, reinforce inclusive school cultures, and advance the Board's goals related to student engagement and well-being.

Disproportionality Data

The HWDSB Research and Analytics Department continues to strengthen the quality, transparency, and use of student-level data to better understand and address disproportionality in discipline outcomes. We know historical HWDSB disproportionality data has displayed that students who self-identified as having a disability, Boy/Male, Bisexual, First Nations, Black, Middle Eastern and Arabic speaking students were suspended at higher rates than the average ([2021-22 Disproportionality Data Report](#)). Staff are in the final year of summarizing a multi-year data cycle that integrates suspension and expulsion data, Healthy Peer Relation Study (HPRS) incident reporting, school climate indicators, the Grade 12 Exit Survey, and the We All Count Census to provide a more comprehensive understanding of student identity, experience, and outcomes.

Our work to address disproportionality remains an ongoing priority. The revised Student Behaviour and Bias-Free Progressive Discipline Policy and updated Code of Conduct embed human rights, anti-racism, and anti-oppression principles and promote a person-centred, trauma-informed, and restorative approach. These foundational documents guide consistent, equitable responses and support improved outcomes aligned with the Board Improvement Plan goals related to student engagement and well-being.

Financial Implications:

There are no incremental financial implications resulting from this report.

Strategic Directions:

Upholding Human Rights, Safety & Well-Being

We will support all students and staff to feel safe and secure in our classrooms and school communities.

Providing Equitable Quality Education

We will offer equitable quality educational opportunities to improve student engagement, learning and achievement for future-readiness.

Collaborating with Students, Families & Communities

We will build reciprocal relationships and partnerships to enhance access and engagement for students, families, and communities.

Reinforcing Indigenous Educational Wellness & Reconciliation

We will honour our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation by nurturing respectful and reciprocal relationships among Indigenous Peoples and Treaty Partners, and by cultivating intergenerational healing and wellness in a restorative education system.

Appendix A: 2024-2025 Suspension and Expulsion Report

Table 1: Suspension Incidents and Suspended Students by Year, 2021-2025

School Year	Total Suspension Incidents	Students Suspended one or more times	Students Identified as Exceptional
2024-25	3339	2437	308
2023-24	3775	2521	274
2022-23	4240	2602	218
2021-22	3482	2275	213
2020-21*	730	538	69

Note: Our Student Data Strategy involves ongoing system data engineering to improve accuracy and transparency; in light of newly structured data, we have been able to retroactively adjust 2022-2024 rate of students identified as exceptional. Further adjustments will occur as we continue this work into 2025-2026.

Table 2a: Number and Proportion of Suspended Students by Panel, 2024-2025

	2024-2025 ¹	Primary K-3	Elementary 4-8	Secondary 9-12
Number of Students ²	57116	19074	20019	18023
Number of Students Suspended	2430	<10	1306	1124
Proportion of Students Suspended	4.3%	<0.1%	6.5%	6.2%
Number of Suspension Incidents	3332	<10	1815	1521

¹Excludes suspensions of students in grades 3 or lower

²Enrollment as of October 2025

Note: Small cell counts are suppressed as a standard practice to prevent the identification of individuals in small groups or those with unique characteristics.

Table 2b: Number of Suspended Students by Panel, 2022-2025

School Year Panel	Incidents	Students Suspended	Percent of Students Suspended
2024/2025	3332	2430	6.4%
Elementary (4-8)	1815	1306	6.5%
Secondary	1521	1124	6.2%
2023/2024	3770	2517	6.6%
Elementary (4-8)	2361	1450	7.2%
Secondary	1409	1067	5.9%
2022/2023	4233	2596	6.9%
Elementary (4-8)	2438	1437	7.2%
Secondary	1795	1159	6.5%

Table 3a: Number of Suspended Students by Frequency² & Panel, 2024-2025

Panel Suspensions per Student	Number of Students	Percent of Students
Elementary (4-8)		
One	874	4.4%
Two	213	1.1%
Three or more	219	1.1%
Secondary		
One	713	3.9%
Two	216	1.2%
Three or more	196	1.1%

²Frequency refers to how many times individual students were suspended in the 2024-2025 school year

Table 3b: Number of Suspended Students by Frequency² & Panel, 2022-2025

Panel School Year	Number of Suspensions		
	One	Two	Three or more
Elementary (4-8)			
2024-2025	874	213	219
2023-2024	918	250	282
2022-2023	926	266	237
Secondary			
2024-2025	712	216	196
2023-2024	720	195	152
2022-2023	746	218	205

Table 4: Number and Percent of Suspended Students by Grade Level, 2022-2025

Grade at Suspension	2022-2023 N (%)	2023-2024 N (%)	2024-2025 N (%)
Grade 4	137 (3.5%)	151 (3.8%)	134 (3.4%)
Grade 5	207 (5.2%)	198 (5.0%)	221 (5.6%)
Grade 6	283 (7.2%)	274 (6.7%)	267 (6.7%)
Grade 7	402 (10.2%)	379 (9.5%)	324 (7.9%)
Grade 8	305 (7.6%)	442 (11.0%)	360 (8.9%)
Grade 9	343 (9.2%)	272 (7.4%)	280 (8.1%)
Grade 10	338 (9.1%)	339 (9.1%)	312 (8.5%)
Grade 11	235 (6.7%)	253 (6.8%)	309 (8.2%)
Grade 12	78 (2.3%)	168 (4.8%)	176 (4.8%)
Grade 12+	41 (2.2%)	40 (1.9%)	47 (2.4%)

Note: K-3 data is not included in this table. Beginning in September 2022, K-3 suspensions are closely monitored to ensure Ministry direction whereby discretionary suspensions for students in junior kindergarten to grade 3 are eliminated

Table 5: Number of Suspended Students by Exceptionality, 2024-2025

	Suspended Students	% of Students with Exceptionalities Suspended
Any Exceptionality	301	8.0%

Note: The Ontario Ministry of Education defines an exceptional pupil as a student who has been identified by an Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC).

Table 6: Number of Suspended Students by Exceptional Status, 2022-2025

Exceptionality	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Behaviour	<10	<10	<10
Autism	20	35	48
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	<10	<10	<10
Learning Disability	109	133	152
Language Impairment	<10	<10	<10
Giftedness	16	15	26
Mild Intellectual Disability	58	74	78
Developmental Disability	<10	<10	<10
Physical Disability	<10	<10	<10
Blind/Low Vision	<10	<10	<10
Multiple Exceptionalities	<10	<10	<10

Notes: The Ontario Ministry of Education defines an exceptional pupil as a student who has been identified by an Identification Placement and Review Committee (IPRC). Small cell counts are suppressed as a standard practice to prevent the identification of individuals in small groups or those with unique characteristics.

Table 7a: Number of Suspension Incidents by Infraction, 2024-2025

Infraction Type Infraction	Elementary (4-8)	Secondary	Total
Board¹			
Board Policy	433	677	1110
Drug Influence	0	<10	*
Fighting	460	316	776
Harmful Act	283	50	333
Inappropriate Behaviour	159	28	187
Social Media	55	24	79
Education Act (Section 306)²			
Alcohol or cannabis influence	<10	27	30
Alcohol or drug possession	14	27	41
Bullying	78	27	105
Swearing	79	73	152
Threat	94	63	157
Vandalism	32	33	65
Education Act (Section 310)³			
Assault	<10	<10	*
Board policy	0	<10	*
Expulsion investigation	125	144	269
Prejudice	<10	<10	*
Repeated bullying	<10	<10	*
Sexual assault	<10	<10	*
Trafficking	0	<10	*
Weapon possession	0	<10	*
Weapon use	0	<10	*

¹ Incidents Identified by the Board as per the Education Act with a corresponding Ministry Code for data collection.

² Incidents identified in the Education Act Section 306 with a corresponding Ministry Code for data collection.

³ Incidents identified in the Education Act Section 310 as possible expulsion, but a suspension was imposed after Principal's Inquiry.

Notes:

Small cell counts are suppressed (<10) as a standard practice to prevent the identification of individuals in small groups or those with unique characteristics. Redactions (*) are made where numbers would reveal the adjacent suppressed cell counts.

Infraction types are not mutually exclusive; some incidents involve multiple infraction types.

Table 7b: Infraction Type Details

Infraction Type Infraction	Description
Board¹	
Board policy	Any other activity for which a student may be suspended under board policy <i>Also Includes the following codes:</i> <i>“Code of Conduct Violation: Board or School Policy”</i> <i>“Other”</i>
Drug influence	Being under the influence of drugs (not cannabis)
Fighting	Fighting or violence
Harmful act	An act harmful to one's physical or mental well-being
Inappropriate behaviour	Inappropriate behaviours
Social media	Using social media negatively
Education Act (Section 306)²	
Alcohol or cannabis influence	Being under the influence of alcohol or, unless the student is a medical cannabis user, cannabis
Alcohol or drug possession	Possessing alcohol, illegal drugs or, unless the student is a medical cannabis user, cannabis
Bullying	Bullying
Swearing	Swearing at a teacher or at another person in a position of authority
Threat	Uttering a threat to inflict serious bodily harm on another person
Vandalism	Committing an act of vandalism that causes extensive damage to school property at the student's school or to property located on the premises of the student's school
Education Act (Section 310)³	
Assault	Committing physical assault on another person that causes bodily harm requiring treatment by a medical practitioner
Board policy	Any other activity for which a student may be expelled under board policy
Expulsion investigation	Under investigation for an offense committed under the Education Act Section 310(1)
Prejudice	Any activity listed in subsection 306(1) that is motivated by bias, prejudice, or hate
Repeated bullying	Bullying (if the student has been previously suspended for engaging in bullying and the student's continuing presence in the school creates an unacceptable risk to the safety of another person)
Sexual assault	Committing sexual assault
Trafficking	Trafficking in weapons or in illegal drugs
Weapon possession	Possessing a weapon, including possessing a firearm
Weapon use	Using a weapon to cause or to threaten bodily harm to another person

Table 8: Suspensions by Infraction, 2021-2024

Infraction Type Infraction	2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
Board¹			
Board policy	1225	976	1110
Drug influence	35	15	<10
Fighting	909	814	776
Harmful act	543	450	333
Inappropriate behaviour	315	300	187
Social media	136	80	79
Education Act (Section 306)²			
Influence of alcohol	<10	12	10
Influence of cannabis	31	30	20
Alcohol or drug possession	17	20	16
Cannabis possession	47	31	25
Bullying	149	130	105
Swearing	238	302	152
Threat	166	194	157
Vandalism	103	75	65
Education Act (Section 310)³			
Assault	10	0	<10
Board policy	<10	0	<10
Expulsion investigation	497	364	269
Prejudice	14	0	<10
Repeated bullying	<10	0	0
Sexual assault	<10	0	<10
Trafficking	<10	0	<10
Weapon possession	12	0	<10
Weapon use	<10	<10	<10

¹ Incidents Identified by the Board as per the Education Act with a corresponding Ministry Code for data collection.

² Incidents identified in the Education Act Section 306 with a corresponding Ministry Code for data collection.

³ Incidents identified in the Education Act Section 310 as possible expulsion, but a suspension is imposed after Principal's Inquiry.

Notes:

Small cell counts are suppressed (<10) as a standard practice to prevent the identification of individuals in small groups or those with unique characteristics. Redactions (*) are made where numbers would reveal the adjacent suppressed cell counts.

Infraction types are not mutually exclusive; some incidents involve multiple infraction types.

Table 9: Number of Expulsions by Year, 2020-2025

School Year	Total Expulsions	Number Students Identified as Exceptional
2024-2025	44	10
2023-2024	38	<10
2022-2023	28	<10
2021-2022	46	<10
2020-2021	<10	<10

Note: Small cell counts are suppressed as a standard practice to prevent the identification of individuals in small groups or those with unique characteristics.

Table 10: Number of Expulsions by Infraction, 2024-2025

Infraction Type	Expelled Students
Board policy	20
Assault	<10
Prejudice	<10
Robbery	<10
Sexual assault	<10
Weapon possession	<10
Weapon use	<10

Note: Small cell counts are suppressed as a standard practice to prevent the identification of individuals in small groups or those with unique characteristics.