New Westminster Schools

Reimagining and Rebuilding Communities Together:
A collective approach to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Antiracism in New Westminster Schools

Territorial Acknowledgement

Indigenous Graduation
Ceremony 2023, NWSS

New Westminster Schools recognizes and acknowledges the Qayqayt First Nation, as well as all Coast Salish peoples, on whose traditional and unceded territories we live, we learn, we play, and we do our work.

We recognize and respect Indigenous peoples who originally lived on this land by acknowledging this traditional territory. This important practice enables everyone in our school communities to learn about local Indigenous cultures which help us build stronger relationships where people feel welcomed. As part of Truth and Reconciliation, the school district is committed to listening, learning, and actively seeking opportunities to open the discussion to promote acknowledgement, truth and, healing with members from all local nations that used this territory.

By recognizing the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism on Indigenous communities, we understand the pressing need to deepen our commitment to building meaningful relationships with local Indigenous communities, staff, and students. The importance of this endeavor extends beyond mere acknowledgement; it lies in the pursuit of truth and reconciliation.

"By developing genuine, deep and meaningful connections to the community and the land, the school district hopes to model positive relationships based on mutual Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Relationship, Resilience and Responsibility."
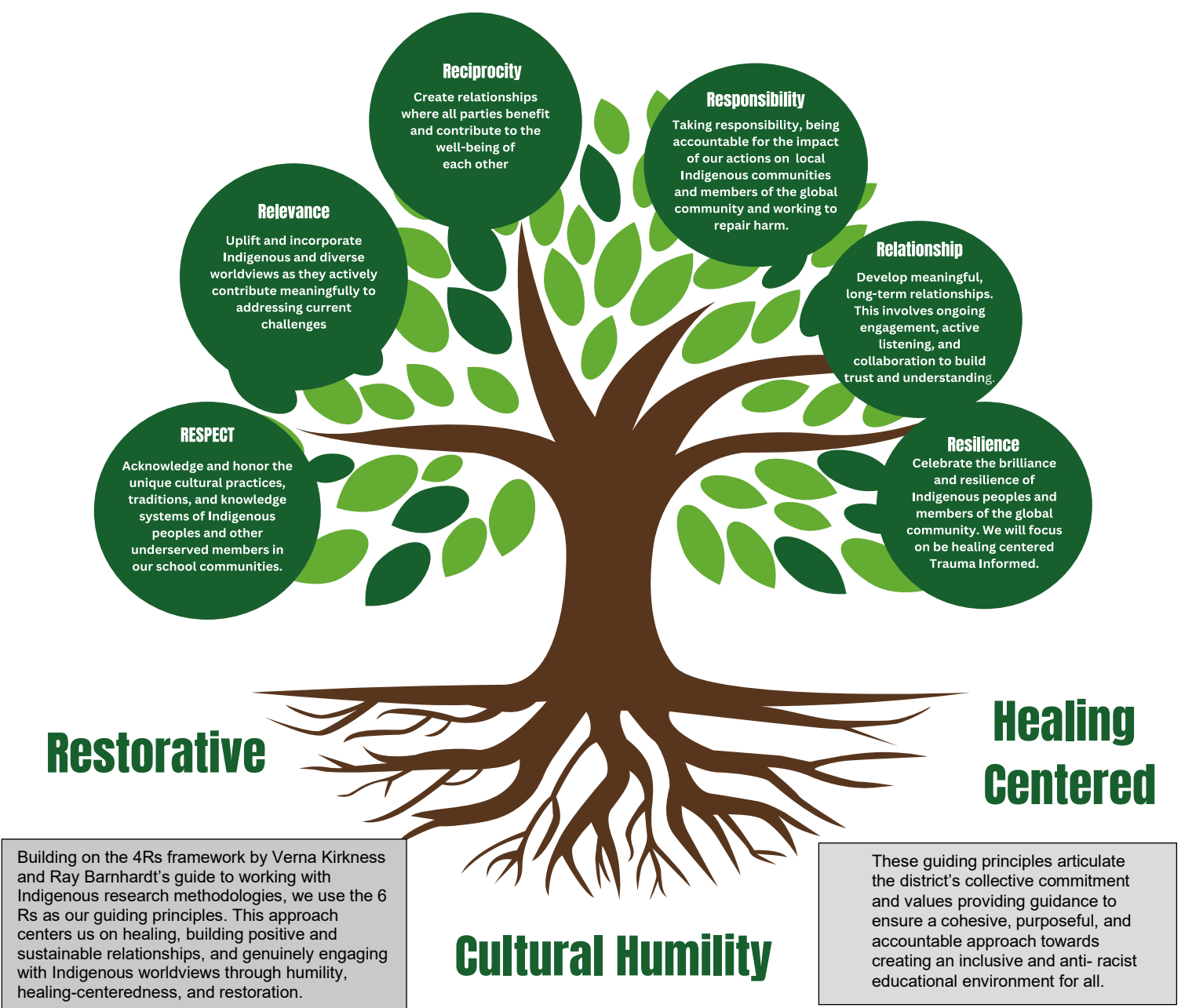
Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being

Prioritizing Indigenous perspectives in our practices, engaging in deeper learning for staff, and creating spaces that honour local Indigenous peoples, languages, and traditions are important steps in our journey towards Truth and Reconciliation. While members of the Indigenous Education department continue to do amazing work supporting students of ancestry, we must remember that reconciliation is not an Indigenous problem. Justice Murray Sinclair states "Reconciliation is not an aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian problem. It involves all of us." Truth and Reconciliation is a shared responsibility and as a school district we will demonstrate a commitment to Truth and Reconciliation by creating environments where Indigenous students feel valued, heard, and empowered, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable educational experience.

By embracing diversity, removing systemic barriers, and working towards inclusivity, we aim to build a society enriched by different perspectives and lived experiences. In reflection of the First Peoples Principles of Learning that "Learning takes patience and time," we recognize the need for both patience and time to dismantle barriers and provide meaningful access to education for everyone. We also connect our commitment to the Haudenosaunee 7th Generation Principle, emphasizing the long-term impact of our actions. Rooted in sustainability and intergenerational responsibility, this principle challenges us to create a world where our efforts benefit future generations. As we work towards a more just and equitable educational environment, we embrace the wisdom of the 7 Generations principle, recognizing that our efforts today shape the future for our students and the generations to come.

Connecting to Our Guiding Principles

Reciprocity
Create relationships where all parties benefit and contribute to the well-being of each other

Responsibility
Taking responsibility, being accountable for the impact of our actions on local Indigenous communities and members of the global community and working to repair harm.

Relevance
Uplift and incorporate Indigenous and diverse worldviews as they actively contribute meaningfully to addressing current challenges

Relationship
Develop meaningful, long-term relationships. This involves ongoing engagement, active listening, and collaboration to build trust and understanding.

RESPECT
Acknowledge and honor the unique cultural practices, traditions, and knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples and other underserved members in our school communities.

Resilience
Celebrate the brilliance and resilience of Indigenous peoples and members of the global community. We will focus on be healing centered Trauma Informed.

Restorative

Healing Centered

Building on the 4Rs framework by Verna Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt's guide to working with Indigenous research methodologies, we use the 6 Rs as our guiding principles. This approach centers us on healing, building positive and sustainable relationships, and genuinely engaging with Indigenous worldviews through humility, healing-centeredness, and restoration.

Cultural Humility

These guiding principles articulate the district's collective commitment and values providing guidance to ensure a cohesive, purposeful, and accountable approach towards creating an inclusive and anti-racist educational environment for all.

Framing our Work (Approach)

Vision: New Westminster Schools is dedicated to creating a community that embraces diversity, champions equity, promotes inclusivity, and actively works against racism AND discrimination in all its forms. We are deeply committed to creating an environment where everyone feels a sense of belonging and their identities are affirmed, valued, respected, uplifted and empowered.

Our vision is rooted in Human Rights, ensuring everyone has fundamental freedoms and protection from discrimination and racism. Recognizing intersectionality—is crucial in addressing racism and all forms of discrimination. It is our shared responsibility (All District Staff) to create a welcoming and inclusive environment where everyone feels they belong and can reach their full potential.

New Westminster School District's policies, procedures and practices are guided by international, national, and local documents focused on Human Rights and uplifting underserved communities. We aim to provide the best opportunities for students, staff, families, and community partners to engage in supportive and empowering spaces, fostering a community where humility, love, and joy are centered.

Ensuring equitable access to quality education for all students, regardless of background, addresses inequities and allows us the opportunity to create an environment where all learners can be their authentic selves.

Focusing on equity broadens our community's understanding of belonging and the purpose of education, ensuring it serves and cares for everyone. By respecting and bridging our differences, we can heal from past harms and guarantee that every child is recognized, valued, and able to thrive.

Using an Inquiry model and these guiding questions to help center the work we do; we can be more intentional in the community and organizational change we would like to see:

The issues of diversity, excellence, quality, and equity in education are inseparable- George Sefa Dei

Scan
What patterns or trends do we observe in our school communities/organization that indicate disparities in experiences or outcomes for different racial, cultural and other equity seeking groups?

Focus
Which specific areas of our practices are most in need of change to promote equity and inclusion for all ?

Check In
How will we measure the impact of our actions on promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and antiracism, and what feedback mechanisms will we use to ensure continuous improvement?

Develop a Hunch
How might our current policies or practices be unintentionally contributing to inequities or exclusion of certain groups?

Take Action
What concrete steps can we take to create a more inclusive and equitable environment for all students, staff, and families?

Learn
What new knowledge or perspectives do we need to acquire to better understand and address issues of racism or discrimination in our schools/organization?
Which voices do we need to invite to table to help us better understand?
How do we make sure we are not creating space for lateral violence?

Adapted from Linda Kaiser and Judy Halpert's Spirals of Inquiry (2013).

Our Commitment is Student Centered:

In January of 2023, the Ministry of Educational released the K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan for BC's education system. This plan is foundational for equity-based initiatives and seeks to address and dismantle historical and current oppressive barriers to ultimately promote student success:

> *"B.C. Students achieve their full potential in an educational environment that is equitable, free of racism and systemic barriers, and where all students, staff, and families feel welcome, safe, respected, and valued."*
>
> *- K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan (Page 5)*

Understanding and practicing antiracism is important work for everyone, including those who have not experienced racism themselves. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Antiracism is not about shaming or blaming each other about our history, but more about how we can use our current privileges to help positively shape our futures collectively. It is important to teach students to work together, to treat others with respect, and kindness no matter where they are from or what they look like. Although we are working together as a community to remove barriers for everyone, we must acknowledge that there are many factors that impact student learning and opportunities and slow down the process of community building. By noticing and naming these factors, we can work together to bring meaningful change. Here are some areas the district is diligently working on to help build community:

- Addressing and responding to racist language/discriminatory language, especially anti-black racism Antisemitism, Islamophobia and Homophobia in schools *(Respect).*
- Working with staff and the community on how best to discuss the discrimination of Indigenous peoples historically and currently *(Responsibility).*
- Being supportive to the 2SLGBTQIA+ community by uplifting and protecting the voices of students and families who face Anti-SOGI discrimination *(Respect).*
- Continue teaching students about gender violence and understanding consent (Developing Sexual Health Educator position) *(Relationship)*
- How to act directly or as a co-conspirator against all forms of racism and hate crimes *(Reciprocity)*
- Using age-appropriate practices and content material that is developmentally suitable to help students understand these complex concepts in a manner that is approachable and impactful. (*Relevance*)
- Advocate that every student has the right to come to school and feel safe; and belong to a school community that is free of racism and discrimination *(Responsibility)*
- Developing high learning expectations in literacy and numeracy while embedding the unique lived experiences of students and their family backgrounds as assets, not deficits *(Resilience).*
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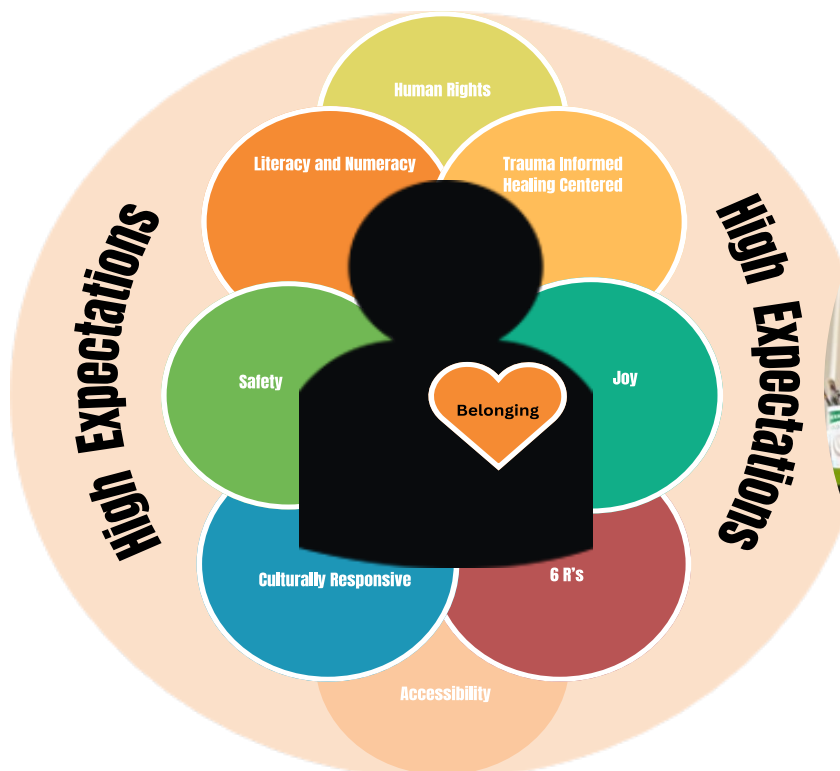
Our Priorities:

Transformative change takes time, and we are committed to doing it right. In our journey of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Antiracism, we recognize we may need to change paths and priorities as things evolve. The framework consists of eight main areas of focus based on themes and responses from the New Westminster Schools JEDI Report:
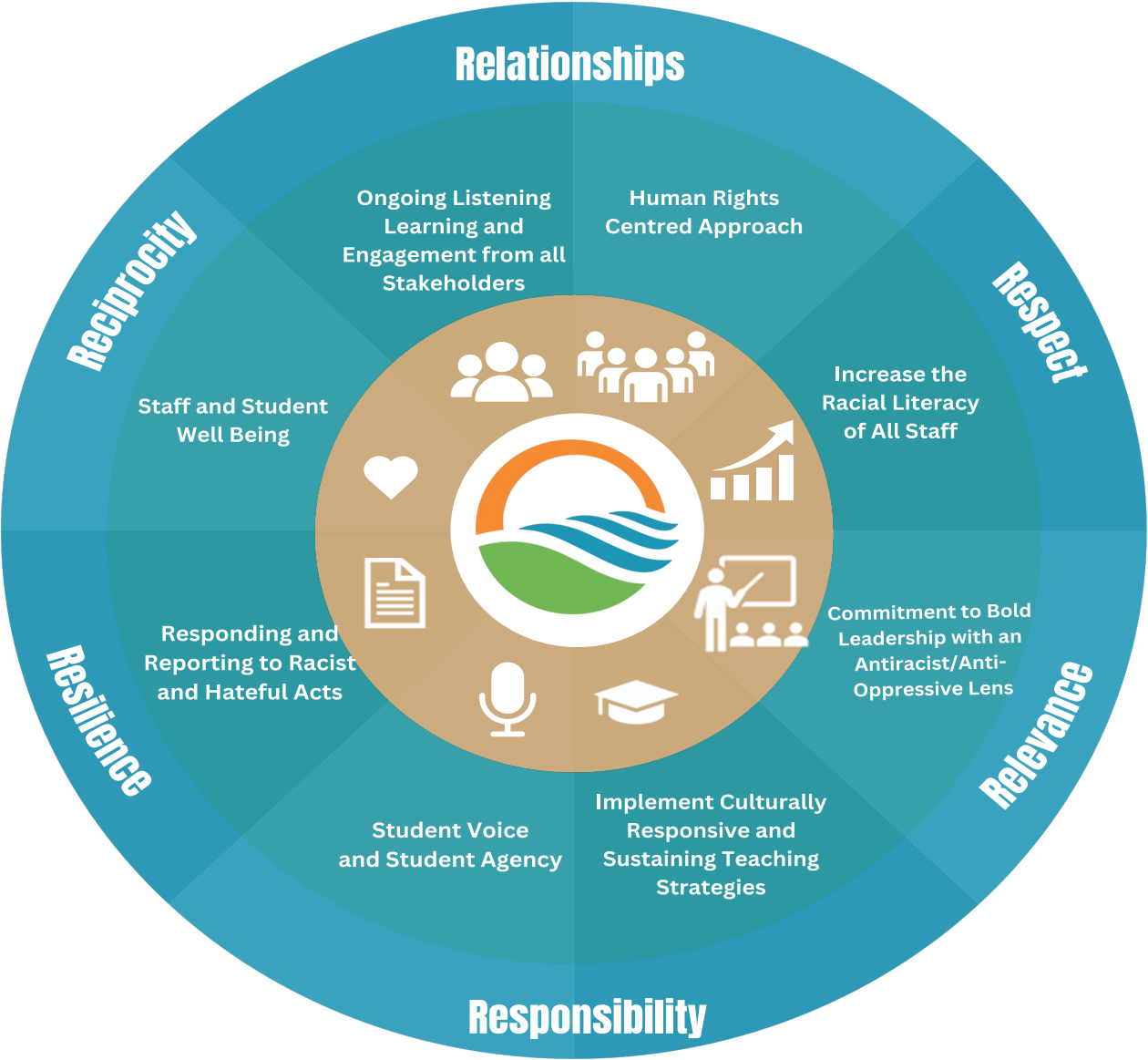
This strategy prioritizes holistic development through developing strong relationships, respect for human rights, relevant teaching and learning methods, and resilience against racism and oppression. Engaging with these priorities will create a respectful, inclusive learning community and workspace for all.

Holding Ourselves Accountable:

Accountability is foundational in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Antiracism work.   It ensures that individuals and organizations remain committed to meaningful progress rather than performative actions. It helps build trust, promotes sustainability and integrity. As we develop a more robust transparent feedback process, here are some ways we are going to be accountable in our work:

- Ask for feedback from people who might feel left out in our community.
- Set up ways for people to give feedback without saying who they are.
- Share reports on how we're doing with diversity, fairness, inclusion, and fighting racism.
- Hold community meetings and listening circles to talk about our efforts in these areas.
- Make clear goals and make sure our leaders meet them.
- Offer learning opportunities that include feedback and data collection.

Transparency
- Board Meetings
- Framework for Enhanced Student Learning
- Yearly Update (Report)
- Good Things Are Happening
- Website and Social Media Updates

Responsibility
- MDI, EDI and Student Satisfaction Data
- Framework for EnhancedStudent Learning
- Indigenous Education Council Meetings
- Student Voice Symposium
- Staff Feedback forms/Surveys

Public Reporting
- Advisory Committees (Antiracism, SOGI, Accessibility)
- District VP of DEIA
- Senior Management Team
- Board of Education
- Student Voice

Annually

Evaluation
- Board of Education
- Senior Management Team
- Advisory Committees (Anti-racism, SOGI, Accessibility) Indigenous Education Council
- Student Voice
- Staff

Ongoing

District Leadership Team
- Senior Management Team
- Human Resources
- Expanded Management Team
- Principal and Vice Principals (NWPVPA)

Ongoing

Community Engagement
- Parents/Guardians/Trusted Adults
- Local Community Officials
- Local Community Organizations
- Local Community Partnerships
- Staff

Ongoing

Commitment
- DLT Meetings
- SMT and Expanded Management Meetings
- NWPVPA Toolkit Sessions
- Weekly Bulletins

Trust
- Surveys
- District PAC
- School Based PAC
- Open Houses
- Information Sessions
- Listening Circles
- Community Partnerships

What we have learned from our JEDI Report, MDI, EDI and Student Satisfaction surveys is that many of our students want to feel more connected to our school and to individuals in our school communities. The questions below, give staff an opportunity to develop respectful and honouring relationships with students. Although having a robust and culturally responsive curriculum helps as well, we believe that these questions are integral in bringing people together, whether it is in the classroom or in the school community. These are some initial student-centered questions that will help build trust and community with learners in your school community:

An intersectional lens approach must be used when asking these questions. We want to make sure we are seeing the wholeness of the student's shared identity markers.

Do you see me?

- Do you ask about my name or pronouns?
- Can I see myself in your space?
- Can I particpate safely and equally in your lessons?
- Can I see myself in your lessons or examples?

Do you understand me?

- Can I tell that you have tried to learn about people like me?
- Do you talk about issues or realities that are important to me?
- On my tough days do you approach me with empathy?

- Do you acknowledge or celebrate days that matter to me?
- Do you accept that I am the expert on my identity, even when I am uncertain?

Do I feel SAFE In HERE?

- Do you use and pronounce my name properly?
- Do you use my pronouns?
- Do you accomodate my learning needs?

- Do your questions and assumptions respect my boundaries?
- Can I trust you with personal information?

Will you support me?

- Do you address negative comments and behaviour that you see or hear?
- Do you believe and support me if I tell you about an event?
- Have you tried to act in ways that support my identity?
- If you can't help me, have you asked for help?

The New Westminster Schools' Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Antiracism framework lays the groundwork for a more just and inclusive future for students and the educational community. By embracing diversity, equity, inclusion, and actively opposing racism and discrimination, we commit to creating an environment where every individual feels valued and empowered. Reimagining Communities is hard work, and shared responsibility. Here are some ways our community can work together help make meaningful and transformative change:

Community Members

Provide services that help students and families mental health and well being after facing discrimination

Co-organize events to help raise awareness of DEIA

Continue to provide access to extracurricular activities

Challenging biases, assumptions and stereotypes

Engage in DEIA efforts/initiatives that are relevant to the community needs

Families and Caregivers

Volunteer or participate in local celebrations or with local community groups

Have open discussions about bias and stereotypes and create a space where children can ask questions without judgement

Expose children to diverse lived experiences through art, music, literature and media

Moving Forward with Community

Report racism and hateful events when witnessed

Celebrate small wins and acknowledge efforts of those trying to be more equitable and inclusive

Model inclusive language and avoid stereotypes

Learn the role Human Rights plays in supporting members in our communities

Form Student led clubs promoting DEIA in schools

Work closely with school staff to help provide opportunities to celebrate diverse lived experiences

Collaborate with school staff to integrate diverse voices in the curriculum

Help reimagine spirit days and events to be more inclusive

Students

The framework serves as a "North Star" or compass, guiding us toward a collective vision of equity, understanding, and unity. Dr. Bettina Love states that we need to "create the schools we are taught to believe are impossible: schools built on justice, love, joy and anti-racism". This quote resonates deeply with our commitment to engage with this work and become more equitable. We understand that our journey towards a more equitable and antiracist educational environment is ongoing, and we are dedicated to learning, growing, and evolving to meet the diverse needs of our students, staff, and community. Together, we aspire to create a school district where everyone thrives, recognizing the richness that diversity brings, and the strength found in belonging, unity, solidarity, and mutual respect.

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Glossary

Ableism: attitudes in society that devalue and limit the potential of persons with disabilities. People with disabilities are assumed to be less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and take part, and of less value than other people. Ableism can be conscious or unconscious and is embedded in institutions, systems or the broader culture of a society.

Accessibility a general term for the degree of ease that something (e.g., device, service, physical environment and information) can be accessed, used and enjoyed by persons with disabilities. The term implies conscious planning, design and/or effort to make sure something is barrier-free to persons with disabilities. Accessibility also benefits the general population, by making things more usable and practical for everyone, including older people and families with small children

Anti-Black Racism: Policies and practices rooted in Canadian institutions such as, education, health care, and justice that mirror and reinforce beliefs, attitudes, prejudice, stereotyping and/or discrimination towards people of African descent.

Anti-Oppressive: An active and consistent process of change to eliminate individual, institutional and systemic racism (and other systemic forces of oppression) as well as the oppression and injustice they cause.

Anti-racism: An active and consistent process of change to eliminate individual, institutional and systemic racism.

Anti-Indigenous Racism: Anti-Indigenous racism is the ongoing race-based discrimination, negative stereotyping, and injustice experienced by Indigenous Peoples within Canada. It includes ideas and practices that establish, maintain and perpetuate power imbalances, systemic barriers, and inequitable outcomes that stem from the legacy of colonial policies and practices in Canada. Systemic anti-Indigenous racism is evident in discriminatory federal policies such as the Indian Act and the residential school system. It is also manifest in the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples in provincial criminal justice and child welfare systems, as well as inequitable outcomes in education, well-being, and health. Individual lived-experiences of anti-Indigenous racism can be seen in the rise in acts of hostility and violence directed at Indigenous people.

Antisemitism: is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred or blame. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

Barrier: anything that prevents a person from fully taking part in all aspects of society. There are many types of barriers – some examples are physical structures, poverty or lack of access to computers.

Colonialism: The policy or practice of acquiring full or partial political control over another country, occupying it with settlers, and exploiting it economically. In the late 15th century, the British and French explored, fought over, and colonized places within North America which constitutes present day Canada.

Cultural Humility: is a lifelong process of self-reflection and self-critique, where individuals continually assess their own cultural identities and biases while learning about and respecting the cultural identities of others.

Decolonization: The ongoing process of recognizing and removing colonial powers.

Discrimination: the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things, for example on the grounds of race, age, or sex.

Equity: is the condition that would be achieved if one's identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. Equity work includes work to address root causes of inequities, not just their manifestation. This includes elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes or fail to eliminate them.

Evidence-based: information that is gathered from research conducted with review by fellow scientists or specialists (peer-review), clear and stated methods, evaluation and repeated studies that give the same outcome.

Gender Expression: is how a person presents their gender. It includes how a person acts and appears. It can include dress, hair, makeup, body language and voice. How a person presents their gender may be different than their **gender identity**. Gender expression includes what pronouns a person uses, such as he, she or they.

Gender Identity: is a person's sense of their gender, including whether they identify as a cisgender or transgender man, woman, Two Spirit, non-binary or otherwise. For some people, gender identity is fixed, meaning it stays the same all the time. For others, it is fluid and can change. Gender identity includes what pronouns a person uses, such as he, she or they.

Healing Centered: is a holistic approach to addressing trauma that goes beyond individual experiences to include cultural, spiritual, civic, and collective dimensions.

Human Dignity: is the recognition that people are valued and worthy of respect simply because they are human.

Human Rights: Simply by existing in the world, you are entitled to certain basic rights: your human rights. Everyone is born with the right to a life of equality, dignity and respect, free from discrimination. These rights are protected in law but not always realized.

Inclusion: appreciating and using our unique differences – strengths, talents, weaknesses and frailties – in a way that shows respect for the individual and ultimately creates a dynamic multi-dimensional organization.

Indigeneity and Indigenous: Indigeneity is tied to land and place. The term 'Indigenous' recognizes this connection of being from and belonging to the land (for example, one could state, "I am indigenous to North America" or "I am indigenous to this body of water").

Inequity: refers to a lack of justice or fairness. Statistics can be used to measure inequities in social outcomes, such as differences in access to health care between different racial groups or genders

Intersectionality: is a concept first developed by lawyer, activist and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in relationship to Black women and the law in the United States. Crenshaw noticed that the legal system failed Black women because it did not acknowledge, or address, systemic inequalities linked to the intersections of racism and sexism. Since that time the concept has been more broadly adopted in health care, education, and other areas. Olena Hankivsky, a professor at Simon Fraser University's School of Public Policy, notes, "according to an intersectionality perspective, inequities are never the result of single, distinct factors. Rather, they are the outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations and experiences.

Islamophobia: Fear, hatred of, or prejudice against the Islamic religion or Muslims.

LGBTQIAS2+: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, 2S (Two-Spirit), Asexual/Aromantic and Intersex

Lateral Violence: Displaced violence directed against one's peers rather than adversaries. This construct is one way of explaining minority-on-minority violence in developed nations. It is a cycle of abuse, and its roots lie in factors such as: colonization, oppression, intergenerational trauma and the ongoing experiences of racism and discrimination.

Marginalization: The process through which certain people are denied opportunities to become fully participating members of society and pushed to the margins of the mainstream, including being prevented from finding work, attaining enhanced levels of education, or gaining access to social services. Marginalization particularly impacts people who experience multiple forms of oppression and discrimination

Power: access to privileges such as information/knowledge, connections, experience and expertise, resources and decision-making that enhance a person's chances of getting what they need to live a comfortable, safe, productive and profitable life.

Prejudice: negative prejudgment or preconceived feelings or notions about another person or group of persons based on perceived characteristics.

Pride (when used in reference to the LGBT community): not being ashamed of oneself and/or showing your pride to others by "coming out," marching in the Pride parade, etc., being honest and comfortable about who you are.

Privilege: unearned power, benefits, advantages, access and/or opportunities that exist for members of the dominant group(s) in society. Can also refer to the relative privilege of one group compared to another.

Race: There is no such thing as race – instead, it is a "social construct." This means that society forms ideas of race based on geographic, historical, political, economic, social and cultural factors, as well as physical traits, even though none of these can legitimately be used to classify groups of people. See Racialization.

Racial Equity: the idea that nobody should face barriers or discrimination because of their race

Racialization: the process by which societies construct races as real, different and unequal in ways that matter and affect economic, political and social life.

Racism: a belief that one group is superior or inferior to others. Racism can be openly displayed in racial jokes, slurs or hate crimes. It can also be more deeply rooted in attitudes, values and stereotypical beliefs. In some cases, people don't even realize they have these beliefs. Instead, they are assumptions that have evolved over time and have become part of systems and institutions.

Stereotype: incorrect assumption based on things like race, colour, ethnic origin, place of origin, religion, etc. Stereotyping typically involves attributing the same characteristics to all members of a group regardless of their individual differences. It is often based on

misconceptions, incomplete information and/or false generalizations.

Systemic barrier: a barrier embedded in the social or administrative structures of an organization, including the physical accessibility of an organization, organizational policies, practices and decision-making processes, or the culture of an organization. These may appear neutral on the surface but exclude members of groups protected by the *Human Rights Code.*

Systemic discrimination: patterns of behaviour, policies or practices that are part of the social or administrative structures of an organization, and which create or perpetuate a position of relative disadvantage for groups identified under the *Human Rights Code.*

Trauma Informed: Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP) as a strengths-based framework grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma. It emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for everyone and creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment

Sources:

BC Human Rights Commission
Government of British Columbia
Ontario Human Rights Commission
CDC Global Health Equity
First Nations Health Authority