

The Toronto District School Board: A global city school system's structures, processes, and student outcomes

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In this article we describe the ways that academic opportunity is distributed within the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), Canada's largest and most demographically diverse public education system. By putting a range of recent outcome data into historical, organizational, and policy contexts, we provide a snapshot of how one of North America's largest school systems works in ways that simultaneously reinforce, and challenge, patterns of academic stratification. Although schooling in some global cities is shaped by decentralization, competition, and a 'school reform industry', public education in Toronto is very much characterized by centralization and increased public investment. Therefore, this paper queries whether these larger historical and structural factors lead to greater equity for racialized and minoritized communities. Through the infusion of equity-focused policies and anti-discrimination-centred interventions, can the case be made that marginalized groups are navigating the school system with greater success? Reviewing historical and recent data from the Toronto Board of Education and TDSB, we reflect on and query the extent of disparity that continues to exist, problematizing the disconnect between policy and addressing the root causes of inequality.

Keywords: tracking; streaming; Toronto; academic stratification; global cities

Introduction

[A] focus in the city in studying globalization will tend to bring to the fore the growing inequalities between highly provisioned and profoundly disadvantaged sectors and spaces of the city, and hence such a focus introduces yet another formulation of questions of power and inequality. (Sassen, 2005: 40)

Since the term 'global city' was popularized by Saskia Sassen in the early 1990s (Sassen, 1991), the concept has clearly been marked by a number of different understandings and perspectives. As compared to descriptors relating to a specific urban area's historical import and/or present population size, many initial treatises on the concept refer to a city's 'hierarchy of importance to the operation of the global system of finance and trade' (Arkhipov and Ushakov, 2014: 169), and/or a measure of the size of its major financial, manufacturing, and service industries, multinational corporation headquarters, number of 'high net-worth individuals', and so on (see, for example, Capgemini/RBC Wealth Management, 2013). More recently, several ranking 'indexes' have also started to include a more diverse range of political and social factors, such as research and development, political engagement, and even quality of life indicators (see, for example, Kearney, 2015; Renn, 2012).

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By comparison, much less is made in this dominant literature of the ‘underside’ attributes of these megalocales. As Sassen suggests poignantly in the opening quotation above, few of today’s ‘global cities’ are free of large, and seemingly growing, social problems such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and inequalities relating to education, health, and general welfare. Interestingly, where these disturbing conditions are (however reluctantly) recognized, the causal relations are often attributed to social forces outside these (otherwise ‘powerful’) entities. Doreen Massey (2007: 16, 21), for example, notes astutely that, in this discourse, the global is portrayed ‘as always somewhere else in its origins. ... Global forces arrive from “elsewhere” and wreak havoc on a previous local embeddedness.’ Similarly, Stewart Tannock (2010: 84) observes that ‘even in the global city, the “local” is construed as a “product” and often a “victim of globalization”’. Massey (2004: 10) adroitly suggests that any examination of global city policies and practices should avoid ‘exonerating the local’.

At the heart of every global city lies its education systems. While data on inequity across geographic regions can be somewhat difficult to collect and analyse, boards of education often have the capacity to explore localized incidents of stratification that mirror larger trends of social inequity. We begin this article by examining Toronto – its historical and contemporary essence as a self-proclaimed ‘global city’. This is followed by an analysis of the development of the city’s public school system, partly to highlight historical continuities – in both its hierarchical structures and programmes, as well as the ways in which students’ outcomes have always very much reflected their diverse social backgrounds, then and now. Further sections of the paper describe in detail a multiplicity of programmes offered within the secondary school panel, and the disproportionate ways in which student identity characteristics are represented within programme enrolment. Pulling from historical records from the former Toronto Board of Education (TBE) for the year 1976, and comparing similar demographic representations from the amalgamated Toronto District School Board (TDSB) for the school year 2011/12, the purpose of this paper is to reflect on and query the role in which equity-driven policy has impacted student outcomes and marked disparities.

To the extent that discussions concerning equitable outcomes within the TDSB focus on system responsibility (as compared to resorts to the terminology of ‘victimization’), key discourses often identify systemic challenges embedded within aspects of curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and structural barriers, disproportionately affecting specific racialized and historically marginalized groups of students. Employing outcome indicators, such as streaming in secondary school, special education enrolment, graduation rates, and post-secondary access, we are able to create a replicable profile of similar stratifications unique to the global city. In addition to identifying system barriers, we will also highlight some of the distinctive interventions the TDSB has implemented in its attempt to address the observed inequities, and to discuss their outcomes in that regard. Our purpose for this paper is to examine more closely the structural features of the TDSB in relationship to identified initiatives aiming to reduce inequities across student communities. Our work is different from many recent examinations of Ontario schooling, which have tended to come from those working in partnership with higher levels of education governance.

Toronto as a global city

The lands that the City of Toronto currently occupies originally contained a long-standing Algonkian Mississauga settlement, an Ojibway/Anishinabe community that historically engaged both in agricultural and trading economies with other Aboriginal settlements across the eastern North American continent. In typical colonial manner, much of these lands were ‘purchased’ by

the British colonial state in 1805 and the original inhabitants were forcibly moved to other parts of the province (Rogers and Smith, 1994). Lots were then surveyed and parcelled out to colonial officials, who subsequently subdivided them for sale to the mainly British and other European immigrants who came in increasing numbers during the second half of the nineteenth century. During this time, the city was legally incorporated, declared the political capital of the province of Ontario, and soon established itself as the province's major industrial and financial centre. By 1900, the city population had reached 238,000, a number that would increase almost five-fold (to 1,117,000) during the first half of the twentieth century with continued immigration in both the pre- and post-World War One eras (City of Toronto, 2015a).

These patterns continued unabated during the post-Second World War era and up to the present, with new immigrants coming increasingly from non-European areas of the world. Currently (2016), the City of Toronto (630 square kilometres) contains an overall population of 2,800,000,¹ having grown by an average of 40,000 in each of the previous five years, a rate that is projected to continue for the foreseeable future (City of Toronto, 2015b). While some of these numbers can be accounted for by population influx from other parts of the province and country, a majority are clearly 'newcomers' to Canada. According to the 2011 Census, 51 per cent of Torontonians were born outside Canada, 49 per cent reported themselves as being part of a visible minority, and only 51 per cent reported that English was their mother tongue. Chinese languages, Tamil, Spanish, Tagalog, and Italian were the top non-English languages spoken at home (City of Toronto, 2013).

Understandably then, the City of Toronto is considered one of the most multicultural and diverse cities in the world. However, the extent to which Toronto can be considered as a 'livable city' seems to depend upon the source cited, and the criteria invoked. On the one hand, in 2015 *The Economist* ranked Toronto as the fourth 'most livable city in the world', using 30 factors related to things such as safety, healthcare, educational resources, infrastructure, and environment (*The Economist*, 2015). On the other hand, in the same year a report issued by the Children's Aid Society of Toronto, citing Statistics Canada data, stated that 'Toronto continues to have the highest child poverty rate amongst large cities in Canada', citing a figure of 28.6 per cent of all children in the city, a level that has remained essentially the same for the past two decades. Even more telling, several areas of the city report child poverty rates of over 50 per cent, and poverty rates in Toronto's ten most 'linguistically diverse' neighbourhoods 'are about 4 times higher than rates in the least linguistically diverse neighbourhoods' (32.5 per cent compared to 8.5 per cent) (The Children's Aid Society of Toronto, 2015).

Clearly, these child poverty rates are closely related to findings of overall economic inequality across Toronto's citizenry – the highest in Canada according to a 2015 report by the United Way organization (using Gini coefficients), and also increasing more rapidly than other urban populations in the country (United Way, 2015). Closely related to data depicting levels of poverty and inequality are reports relating to pressing social conditions such as unemployment, mental and physical health, and homelessness – with similar reports suggesting that Toronto exhibits high, and very unacceptable, levels of incidence (see, for example, Shapcott, 2013; City of Toronto, 2015c).

A 'livable city' is definitely a relative concept. When it comes to schooling, to what extent do these demographics influence, or perhaps even determine, the policies, programmes, and practices of the public school system, charged with the responsibility 'to promote student achievement and well-being' (Government of Ontario, 1990)? To what extent have these radically changing demographics been reflected in the system's ongoing attempts to ensure an equitable outcome for all of those students, many of whom begin at age 4, and all of whom are, by law, required to enroll in schools from the ages of 6 to 18? In the next section, we will explore this

huge public schooling system – its history, political control, administrative structure, and data on numbers and types of schools, staff, and students.

Overview of the Toronto District School Board (TDSB)

The history of education and schooling during the early years of colonization in Canada very much reflected the contemporary situation in Britain. Schooling, where it existed at all, was voluntary, and provision was effected very much in relation to the social class and geographic location of families. From the outset, schools for the male offspring of the elite were provided through family resources subsidized by state funds. As the colony developed, an increasing number of voluntary schools, often located in the homes of independent teachers, were established in towns and villages for children of those parents who could afford the modest tuition (Houston and Prentice, 1988). With the anti-colonial rebellions of the late 1830s, however, colonial officials were able to convince the British home office that a compulsory, centrally controlled, state schooling system was necessary to instill ‘proper’ social relations among the future citizens of the colony. Enabling legislation and significant amounts of funding were provided, and by mid-century the core of a province-wide state schooling was in place (Curtis, 1988).

While locally elected ‘school boards’ were required, and encouraged, to take the initiative to construct and operate these schools, they could only do so through a myriad of provincial regulations concerning the ways in which these schools were to be organized and run, using only approved textbooks and employing only those teachers who had been ‘properly’ selected, trained, and continually supervised by formally designated officials (Curtis, 1988). To oversee all of this, a provincial Superintendent of Education was appointed, and a provincial Department of Education established, whose structure and staffing were certainly to grow over time.

Under these mid-nineteenth-century regulations, officials in Toronto were quick to establish a city-wide schooling administrative structure – a ‘Board of Education’ consisting structurally of a Director of Education and an administrative staff, responsible to a group of local ‘school trustees’ (essentially elite males), who were selected during annual municipal elections. Local primary schools, built as local populations required them, staffed invariably by female teachers, were presided over by male principals who reported to the Director of Education. In fact, this basic administrative structure pertains to this day, albeit with the addition of a large number of school superintendents and other administrative structures and personnel to preside over, and support, close to 600 schools (primary and secondary) across Toronto. During the twentieth century the Toronto School Board also took responsibility for secondary school education and, as will be discussed later, began a process of differentiating programmes at both the elementary and secondary levels for identified students. In 2014, the Toronto School Board reported that there were 172,933 students in 475 primary grade schools (junior kindergarten to Grade 8) and 79,661 students in 113 secondary schools (Grades 9 to 12) – making it by far the largest public school system in Canada, and one of the largest in North America. Its operating budget was reported at just over \$3 billion (Canadian), and it employed just under 16,000 teachers (TDSB, 2014d).

As compared to the demographic profile of the city population at large, the students of the TDSB are even more diverse and economically stratified (TDSB, 2014d). Over 70 per cent of the school district’s population identifies as other than White, over half of students speak a language other than English at home, and the majority of students come from immigrant families (TDSB, 2014d). In 2011/12, the four largest self-identified racial backgrounds were: White (29 per cent), South Asian (24 per cent), East Asian (15 per cent), and Black (12 per cent). (Other groups included ‘Mixed’, Middle Eastern, Southeast Asian, Latin American, and Aboriginal.) Similar to the

city as a whole, the major non-English language groups among TDSB students included Chinese,² Tamil, Urdu, and Bengali. Finally, while 76 per cent of all 2014 students were born in Canada, in a 2012 count, 67 per cent of their parents were immigrants to the country (TDSB, 2014d).

By comparison, the TDSB has published little or no data concerning the make-up of its teaching staff. Canadian census data state that in 2007, there were about 63,000 'teachers' living in Toronto, of whom 14.7 per cent identified as being of visible minority background. However, this overall number is four times that of the TDSB teaching cohort, so it is difficult to determine whether this percentage reflects that of the TDSB teachers. A voluntary survey undertaken of TDSB employees in 2006 by an outside consulting firm found that, of those responding, 22 per cent of classroom teachers self-identified as visible minority – as compared to over 70 per cent of the students they taught (Herring, Barbara and Associates, 2007). In any event, by several reports, it seems clear that the teaching population remains overwhelmingly 'White' as compared to the students they instruct (see, for example, Ryan *et al.*, 2007; Ontario College of Teachers, 2012; New Canadian Media, 2014). (An exploration of possible relationships between teacher diversity and student outcomes is beyond the scope of this paper.)

The TDSB in its provincial context

In this paper we present a range of data from the Toronto District School Board that demonstrate demographic patterns in educational opportunity. The chance to achieve success is not randomly distributed among the students in the school district. Part of understanding how this distribution happens requires understanding the policy and governance contexts within which the TDSB operates.

Over the past decade, Ontario has been the site of a high-profile system-wide school change initiative that has attracted a great deal of national and international attention (for example, Hargreaves and Shirley, 2009; Campbell, 2016; Fullan, 2012). A Liberal government with a mandate to reinvest in public education and restore public confidence responded with both increased levels of pressure and support, especially emphasizing early years literacy and high-school graduation targets. By moving key decision-making to the Ontario Ministry of Education and away from school-district leadership in the realms of in-school finance, school curriculum, standardized testing, primary class size, and academic priorities, for example, policymakers have emphasized centralized mandates to common problems. This trend did not originate with the current government (Ben Jaafar and Anderson, 2007) but the experience of, for example, Primary Class Size Reduction, saw significant constraints placed on school and district discretion for pupil assignment (Flessa, 2012). The relevance for our analysis of the TDSB is to keep in mind that the province has demonstrated that when it is interested in responding to system-wide problems, it has the tools and capacity to do so.

But this is not a study of a provincial response to streaming; we are looking at the local district level. The fact that the TDSB collects the data and conducts the analysis is itself a striking organizational behaviour not shared by the vast majority of its fellow school districts. In fact, as compared to other jurisdictions, Ontario boards are not required, nor do many, collect and report data on student or teacher demographics, or the former's related outcomes.

Also, it would be an oversimplification to say that school districts in Ontario operate in uniformly 'tightly-coupled' systems of command and control. Although many goals are set centrally, the path to achieving those goals is not prescribed. For example, and most relevant to this paper, the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy of the Ministry states that 'recent immigrants, children from low-income families, Aboriginal students, boys, and students with special education needs are just some of the groups that may be at risk of lower achievement'

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009: 5), but does not prescribe (or evaluate) how a school district should identify and ameliorate these problems (Flessa, 2014). Similarly, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, as well as parental engagement, policies assert provincial aspirations for inclusion but provide few inducements or mechanisms for ensuring commitment to the stated goals.

It is interesting to note, however, that to whatever extent the provincial government has authority over the funding and operation of local school boards, and whatever the extent of perennial concerns at the local level about budgets and deficits, from most reports the TDSB (and other public school boards in Ontario) have been relatively free of the seemingly radical reforms being implemented, top-down, in many jurisdictions in the United States (see, for example, Au, 2007; Croft *et al.*, 2016). Curriculum edicts in Ontario, where they have occurred, have not generally been of the back-to-basics variety, but rather have often reflected concerns about ensuring widespread attention to issues of social justice and equity (see, for example, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). While boards are required to rationalize their financial practices and efficiencies, including the use of school buildings, there has been little imposition of high-stakes standardized student testing, or significant cutbacks in terms of class sizes, teacher–pupil ratios, or support services for students and teachers. In addition, as compared to at least some jurisdictions elsewhere, teachers' tenure, and pedagogical and professional autonomy (to whatever extent they existed historically), have not been usurped by regulations such as those removing tenure, tying teachers' continued employment to student test outcomes, or imposing top-down, arbitrary 'professional development' and compulsory standardized teacher testing.

At the same time, as will be discussed in detail below, both the provincial government and the TDSB have been clearly caught up in the professed 'need' to 'globalize' the aims, and outcomes, of public schooling. Annual reports and other missives exhort the importance of ensuring that school graduates are 'competitive' in the global market (see, for example, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015) – making it very clear that the purpose of schooling, in these minds, is that of producing 'employable' citizens. To this end, as we detail below, the overall programme structures of secondary schools in the province – officially labelled 'Pathways' – require that students be sorted and streamed into various levels of programmes, based upon their perceived capacity and 'interests'.

Overview and description of programmes/structures (streaming) in the TDSB

For some, public education is intended to be the great equalizer of social and economic opportunity. However, for decades scholars have been discussing how structural barriers embedded within secondary programming, particularly related to academic tracking or streaming, lead to the replication of social and economic stratification (Baker, 2002; Curtis *et al.*, 1992; Clandfield *et al.*, 2014). In 1999, the Ministry of Education in Ontario officially announced the abolition of streaming – by replacing a triple-tiered secondary system in which students could take courses at the Advanced, Intermediate, or Basic level, with a multi-tiered secondary system. During Grades 9–10, three levels of courses remained: Academic, Applied, and Locally Developed. However, for Grades 11–12, five levels were created: University, Mixed, Open, College, and Workplace (Parekh, 2014). This new higher degree of 'choice' across programme levels at the upper grades was intended to suggest that any rigidity in programming had been removed.

However, when researchers began to explore the programme levels in which students took the majority of their courses, coupled with tracking academic trajectories across secondary school, clear patterns emulating the historical system of streaming emerged. During the 2011/12

school year, less than two-thirds (65.7 per cent) of secondary students had taken the majority of their courses at the Academic level (prerequisites for access into university programmes), while over a third of all students were registered in lower-level courses. In addition, trends demonstrated a strong relationship between Grades 9–10 programme of study and the level of courses taken in Grades 11–12. For example, most students ended up taking courses in Grades 11–12 that corresponded to the level of courses taken in Grades 9–10 (Academic to University level, Applied to College level, Locally Developed to Workplace level) (Parekh, 2014).

These structured pathways have enormous implications for students' graduation and post-high-school opportunities. In the 2011/12 analysis of TDSB data, over 80 per cent of students taking the Academic programme of study in Grades 9–10 graduated on time (in four years) as compared to less than 40 per cent of students taking the Applied programme of study and approximately 20 per cent of students taking the Locally Developed programme of study. In terms of post-secondary opportunities, over half (55.2 per cent) of students enrolled in the Academic programme of study in Grades 9–10 confirmed an offer to a four-year university programme in Ontario following four years of high school. However, despite the implied destination of a two-year college programme, only 10.9 per cent of students who were in the Applied programme of study confirmed an offer to a two-year Ontario College programme after four years. In fact, the large majority of students in the Applied programme of study (79.3 per cent) did not even apply to any post-secondary education programmes following graduation. This proportion of non-applicants rose even higher, to 94.3 per cent, for students who had been in the Locally Developed programme of study in Grades 9–10 (Parekh, 2014). These data are an indication of the post-high-school consequences resulting from a streamed K-12 system.

Historical comparisons of demographic characteristics across academic streams

The collection of demographic data has a long history in the TDSB as well as in its predecessor board, the TBE. Data pulled from the Every Student Survey were first publicly released in 1969 by researcher E.N. Wright (Wright, 1970). In 1976, a comparative study was released by Deosaran and Wright in which they outlined trends around academic programme placement and student demographics. A key focus of their report was the distribution of students whose first language was other than English, students new to Canada, and students' socio-economic class across academic programmes. While the structure of the secondary system has evolved since 1970, comparisons in relation to representation are possible (Deosaran and Wright, 1976).

The 1976 Deosaran and Wright report indicated a strong relationship between students' age of arrival in Canada, their primary language, and their assigned academic level of study in the school system. Students arriving in Canada between the ages of 1 and 11 whose first language was other than English were at the greatest disadvantage in accessing the highest academic level of programming in high school (roughly 15 per cent less likely than their English-speaking peers immigrating at the same age). However, this disadvantage was reversed for students immigrating to Canada after the age of 12. Newly immigrated students aged 12 and up experienced parity with their English-speaking peers, and students arriving over the age of 16 were much more likely to access the highest level of academic programming as compared to their immigrant peers whose first language was English. This is an interesting finding as it could indicate how an intersectional relationship between immigration, language, race, class, and systemic forces plays a critical role in determining academic pathways, particularly for students entering elementary school.

When age of immigration is removed from the 1976 analysis, students who had immigrated to Canada and whose first language was not English were at the greatest disadvantage in accessing the highest academic level of secondary programming.

Interestingly, students who were born in Canada and whose first language was other than English had the greatest access to the highest level of academic programming. This finding most likely speaks to immigration patterns at the time of the study. Current data from the TDSB demonstrate that across primary language categories students most likely to enrol in the highest Academic programme in 2011/12 were students whose primary language was Bengali, Hindi, Korean, Romanian, Russian, or Serbian. Students who were more likely to take the majority of their courses in the lower streams (Applied and Locally Developed) were students who spoke Dari, Spanish, Turkish, Portuguese, and Pashto. The collection of ethno-racial demographics in the TDSB did not begin until 2006. Therefore, it was not possible to deconstruct the intersection of race and immigration patterns in 1976. However, TDSB data (2011) demonstrated that students who self-identified as East Asian, South Asian, or White were under-represented across the lower streams and over-represented in the Academic programme of study. By comparison, students who self-identified as Black were notably over-represented in both the Applied and Locally Developed programmes of study (Parekh, 2014).

In 1976, Deosaran and Wright also explored the relationship between socio-economic class and programme enrolment. They determined that students whose head of household was employed in a high-income-earning position, such as an accountant, engineer, or lawyer, were much more likely to access the highest academic secondary programme (90.4 per cent), whereas students whose parents worked as sales clerks or machinists were less likely (63.8 per cent), and students whose head of household was non-remunerative were least likely to access the highest level of academic programming (22.2 per cent) (Deosaran and Wright, 1976). Over three decades later, we see little change in this pattern. Exploring the 2011/12 data from the TDSB, enrolment in programmes of study across socio-economic variables reveals similar stratification of privilege and disadvantage (Parekh, 2014). Students enrolled in the highest Academic programme of study were more likely to be from families with economic privilege, have parents who had a university education, worked as professionals, and have access to two parents. In contrast, students who were enrolled in the Applied and Locally Developed programmes of study for Grades 9–10 were more likely to be from families with a certain degree of economic disadvantage, have parents who were skilled or unskilled labourers or were non-remunerative, and more likely to have access to only one parent. Acknowledging the graduation and post-secondary trajectories of students across each programme of study, it is clear that the mechanism of streaming functions as a social and economic organizer for broader society. It is equally clear that the system of streaming does not proportionately impact diverse student populations; rather, certain communities of students, particularly racialized and poor communities, face inordinate barriers in accessing post-secondary education opportunities.

Description/discussion of selected TDSB student programmes³

One of the notable features of the TDSB is that, in addition to tiered programmes of study (Academic, Applied, and Locally Developed), it also offers a number of specialized programmes of choice. However, access to these programmes, their structure, and outcomes also present an interesting narrative of how a diverse population is further organized across various opportunities. While the TDSB offers numerous programmes of choice for students to pursue (for instance, the Elite Athlete, International Baccalaureate, Advanced Placement, Africentric Schooling, and Specialty Arts programmes) (TDSB, 2014e), this paper outlines four programmes, selected on the

diverse representation of students accessing each programme, and discusses their implications in a multicultural and social justice focused context. In order to draw connections to the historical data on streaming, the programme analysis below focuses on variables such as socio-economic class, home language, and ethno-racial identity. Detailed data on programme, academic, and student characteristics can be found in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Academic indicators across programmes of choice in the TDSB, 2011/12⁴

Academic Indicators (proportion of students)	French (%)	Gifted (%)	Alternative (%)	SHSM (%)	Total across Secondary (%)
Academic	97.9	99.6	46.6	53.8	65.7
Applied	0.6	0.2	45.5	38.1	25.4
Locally Developed	0.0	0.0	3.4	5.0	4.1
Undefined	1.6	0.2	4.5	3.2	4.8
Graduate on time	88.5	96.6	20.4	46.2	67.5
Offer to Ontario University	62.5	79.8	8.8	2.2	39.5

Table 2: Identity characteristics across programmes of choice in the TDSB, 2011/12⁵

Identity characteristics (proportion of students)	French (%)	Gifted (%)	Alternative (%)	SHSM (%)	Total across Secondary (%)
Female	61.3	36.2	50.4	37.5	47.1
Male	38.7	63.8	49.6	62.5	52.9
White	55.4	41.6	54.4	20.9	28.3
South Asian	4.9	12.0	8.3	21.6	21.0
East Asian	8.4	31.1	4.2	9.1	17.9
Black	11.1	3.2	10.4	21.3	12.6
Special Ed Needs (excl. Gifted)	3.9	0.0	14.7	23.0	15.9
First generation	43.6	62.0	41.8	73.4	71.5
English	67.3	49.4	79.0	49.3	44.3
Parent with university education	72.5	81.1	48.1	31.7	47.5
Parents employed as professionals	43.7	48.6	25.0	16.1	24.5

French Immersion

French Immersion provides students with the opportunity to take their core courses in French. As of 2013, French Immersion programmes were offered within ten secondary schools across Toronto. In Canada, French and English are official languages. The opportunity to gain bilingualism is considered to be academically and economically advantageous, particularly for future post-secondary and employment opportunities (Curtis *et al.*, 1992; Parekh *et al.*, 2011). Students enrolled in secondary French Immersion programmes (2011/12) were much more likely to be enrolled in the Academic programme of study (97.9 per cent), much more likely to graduate on time (88.5 per cent), and much more likely to confirm an offer to university (62.5 per cent) as compared to all TDSB secondary students. Across student demographic characteristics, students enrolled in French Immersion were almost twice as likely to identify as White, 1.5 times as likely

to have English as their home language, 1.5 times as likely to have parents who have gone to university, 1.8 times as likely to have parents employed as professionals, and 2.5 times as likely to come from the highest income decile as compared to the TDSB secondary average. Despite it being defined as a programme of choice, analyses of streaming practices must consider the role French Immersion plays in the organization of students.

Gifted programming

Special education programming and services dedicated to supporting students demonstrating challenges in school have been historically embedded within the public education system. However, the explosion of programming dedicated to students who are identified as gifted is on the rise (Brown and Parekh, 2013). As can be imagined, students enrolled in secondary Gifted programming experience high academic achievement, with almost all students enrolled in the Academic programme of study (99.6 per cent), graduating on time (96.6 per cent), and confirming an offer to an Ontario university following graduation (79.8 per cent). However, the demographic trends associated with Gifted programming are also interesting. Students in Gifted were 1.5 times as likely to identify as White, 1.7 times as likely to identify as East Asian, and have an over-representation of students whose home languages were Chinese and English. Parents of students in Gifted were 1.7 times as likely to have gone to university, twice as likely to work as professionals, and 2.7 times as likely to come from the highest income decile across Toronto. Gifted programming is often perceived as an accommodation and is included under the special education umbrella. However, the skewed demographic representation accessing the gifted identification, and subsequent enriched programming, indicates another way in which systems replicate segregation and privilege.

Specialist High Skills Major programmes

Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) programmes are relatively new initiatives created by the Ministry of Education. They are dedicated to reaching and engaging students who are perceived to be at-risk for leaving school early or not reaching graduation. The Ontario Ministry of Education has approved the SHSM programmes and has earmarked provincial funding to support the implementation. Each programme has a set of credit requirements and includes the following areas of specialization: art and culture; aviation and aerospace; business; construction; energy; environment; health and wellness; horticulture and landscaping; hospitality and tourism; information and communication technology; justice, community safety, and emergency services; manufacturing; non-profit; sports; and transportation (TDSB, 2013c). As compared to French Immersion and Gifted programming, students enrolled in SHSM programmes encounter far greater barriers in navigating the education system. Just over half of students (53.8 per cent) enrolled in SHSM programmes take the majority of their courses at the Academic level, 46.2 per cent graduated on time, and 2.2 per cent confirmed an offer to an Ontario university following graduation. Students in SHSM programmes were 1.7 times as likely to self-identify as Black and were much more likely to speak English, Spanish, or Portuguese. Parents of students in SHSM programmes were only two thirds as likely to have gone to university or to be employed as a professional and just over a quarter as likely (0.27) to earn income within the highest income decile as compared to the board average. As compared to French Immersion and Gifted programming, SHSM programmes underscore streaming through the appearance of student choice. Guided towards inequitable outcomes, the SHSM creates a segregated space for already marginalized students.

Alternative schools

There are currently 22 secondary alternative schools in the TDSB (Parekh, 2014). Each alternative school is unique, with a distinct identity and approach to curriculum delivery. They usually feature a small student population, a commitment to innovative and experimental programmes, and volunteer commitment from parents/guardians and other community members. While the schools offer Ministry-approved courses, these courses are delivered in a learning environment that is flexible and meets the needs of individual students. Unlike many of the other programmes reviewed in this paper, alternative schools cater to a much more diverse student population. Overall, students enrolled in secondary alternative schools tend not to access academic programming as often (46.6 per cent), are less likely to graduate on time (20.4 per cent), and less likely to confirm an offer to university (8.8 per cent) than the overall TDSB average. White students were notably over-represented within alternative schools, whereas South Asian and East Asian students were notably under-represented. Students whose home language is English were over-represented by 1.7 times – the only language notably over-represented within alternative schools. Socio-economic characteristics of parents of students in alternative schools were fairly representative of the TDSB average in terms of university education, income, and occupation. Alternative schools also seem to cater to a specific demographic in terms of race and language; however, across class variables, they were fairly representative of the board. Further exploration as to how alternative schools have created equitable class representation needs to be pursued.

Description/discussion of selected board-wide TDSB programmes

While this paper has outlined historical and current evidence of structural inequity across secondary pathways and programmes, the TDSB seeks opportunities to incorporate tools and implement programming to address and support historically marginalized communities. The TDSB's mission statement includes a commitment and valuation of diversity, equity, and accessibility (TDSB, 2016). As a reflection of this commitment, a number of board-wide programmes and initiatives have been implemented, targeting diverse communities of students. Below is a sample of programmes implemented by the TDSB in an attempt to address various aspects of equity and target populations who have experienced historical marginalization.

Parent and Family Literacy Centres

The Parent and Family Literacy Centres (PFLC) are offered within 78 elementary schools across the TDSB. First established in 1981, the goal of the programme is to support children (up to age 6) and their families as they prepare to enter the school system. Geographic locations of the programmes aim to reach largely diverse and high-needs communities (Yau *et al.*, 2012–13). In addition to engaging children in readiness skills and inclusive programming, a notable component of the programme is an attempt to build community capacity among parents and provide opportunities to network, connect with other parents with similar aged children, and share resources. Programming delivered through the PFLC is designed to be fun, interactive, and play-based. While a Parent Worker is onsite and coordinates activities, the programme is designed to encourage parents and caregivers to participate in the programming and engage with the learning environment (TDSB, 2014a).

In addition to skill-building programming for young children, community agencies often collaborate with PFLCs to share resources and information, particularly around health concerns, employment, child development, settlement, and community resources (Yau *et al.*, 2012–13). Multiple evaluations of the PFLC structure have been conducted over its thirty-year history and

have demonstrated both positive academic outcomes for children, and enhanced networking and capacity-building opportunities for parents. As noted in the latest evaluation of the programme, undertaken by TDSB researchers, 'This capacity building for parents was particularly valuable for families in high-needs or immigrant communities, where parents were often experiencing isolation with their young child(ren), and where resources, social networks and familiarity with or access to community services were limited' (Yau *et al.*, 2012–13: 4).

Inclusive education

In addition to supporting parents and pre-school-age children, the TDSB has also made recent commitments to creating inclusive education opportunities for students from kindergarten to Grade 12 – by offering a proportion of students currently in segregated special education programmes the opportunity to return to the regular class with support. Clearly, these steps were taken based on the wealth of theoretical and empirical evidence that points to the academic, social, and future economic benefits of providing inclusive learning opportunities for all students, in particular students identified as having special education needs or disabilities (Mitchell, 2010; Rix *et al.*, 2009). In addition to research demonstrating the benefits of inclusive education, there are also a number of texts that point to the devastating outcomes facing students who have been segregated into special education classrooms (Brown and Parekh, 2010; Brown and Parekh, 2013; Reid and Knight, 2006). While inclusive practices are important to all student populations, segregation through special education has been evidenced to disproportionately affect racialized and minoritized students, as well as students living in poverty (Artiles *et al.*, 2010; De Valenzuela *et al.*, 2006; Ferri and Connor, 2005; Skiba *et al.*, 2006). In keeping with these themes, the TDSB itself recently released a monograph outlining its vision of inclusion, which includes a social justice and anti-discrimination framework as well as strategies educators and administrators can adopt to promote greater inclusion (Parekh and Underwood, 2015).

In light of this research, and other calls for change, over the 2013/14 school year, the TDSB committed to reducing the proportion of students in segregated special education classes by 50 per cent (TDSB, 2013d), through supporting a greater number of students, identified as having special education needs, within the regular classroom. The first step in this initiative involves a plan to move, in September 2016, 2,000 students in kindergarten to Grade 3 from segregated special education classes into inclusive placements. (Unfortunately, however, as noted below, preliminary results from this initiative are not positive.)

Clearly, this inclusion initiative is being driven by hopes of improving the educational outcomes for students being moved to inclusive settings, and also the goal of bringing about greater equity and reducing the historical and current stratification of student opportunity along the lines of race, language, class, gender, and immigration status. However, key to the success of any inclusion strategy is the actualization of support in the regular class environment. Critics of a segregated special education system suggest that the perception of who is at-risk or who requires specialized programming is often artificially defined (Brantlinger, 2006). In spite of these limitations, it is certainly the hope of TDSB officials (and others) that a more inclusive education system will enrich regular education programming and structure school and classroom climates to be both reflexive and responsive.

The Learning Opportunities Index

The Learning Opportunities Index (LOI) – a method of rating school neighbourhoods on the basis of educational 'needs' – was developed to guide the allocation of staff and resources across

the TDSB in the most effective way possible. Indicators used to determine the LOI are specific to the students' neighbourhood demographics and include: median income; percentage of families whose income is below the low income measure (before tax); percentage of families receiving social assistance; adults with low education; adults with university degrees; and lone-parent families. Based on these indicators, schools are then ranked on a continuum. Ranking number one on the LOI would indicate the highest level of external challenge as compared to schools across the system. While the TDSB has employed some iteration of the scale for over thirty years, the LOI is reviewed every two years and is adjusted based on the most current research.⁶ According to the TDSB, the LOI has been a useful tool for the TDSB to ensure that available resources and staff can be distributed more equitably across the system (TDSB, 2014b).

Model Schools for Inner Cities

Model Schools for Inner Cities (MSIC) is a programme that aims to provide greater resources for students living in high-needs neighbourhoods. Established in 2005, seven model schools were identified from across the board, largely selected based on the level of neighbourhood challenge as determined by the LOI as well as on demonstrated leadership and praxis. Investing \$25 million into the MSIC initiative, the programme established its 'Essential Components for Change' – a package of philosophical and pedagogical approaches critical to reducing the opportunity gap. Driven by commitments to equity, community, inclusivity, and high expectations for all students, the five essential components guiding MSIC praxis were: 'Innovative teaching and learning practices; Support services to meet social, emotional and physical well-being of students; School as the heart of the community; Research, review and evaluation of students and programs; and Commitment to share successful practice' (TDSB, n.d.: 1). An internal evaluation of the programme after its initial three years demonstrated notable success in terms of student achievement, student attendance, school readiness, and student climate. With increased funding distributed across the seven initial MSIC sites, further initiatives were developed within those schools, including hearing and vision screening services, opportunities for parent engagement and community partnerships, nutrition and after-school programmes, specialized staff deployment (for instance, teaching and learning coaches, lead teachers, community support workers), and adopting a curriculum that embraced a social justice lens (TDSB, n.d.). Given the reported successes of the MSIC initiative, it has been expanded to 150 schools across the TDSB (TDSB, 2014c).

Summary comments

The Toronto District School Board is a useful case for examining several dynamics shaping schooling and opportunity in global cities. In a context of unprecedented demographic diversity and increasingly pluralist demands on the public system, policymakers have responded in two interesting and potentially contradictory ways. On the one hand, a series of investments – both financial and in 'professional capital' (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012) – coupled with concrete achievement benchmarks and frameworks to guide greater equity have shored up the public system at a time when policymakers in other jurisdictions have embraced 'non-system actors' and competition as a remedy to perceived public system failures (see, for example, Coburn, 2005). On the other hand, the same system has left intact the stratification of educational opportunity along observable demographic lines via academic streaming, a host of other specialized programmes, and a demographically unrepresentative teaching staff that continues to privilege some children while disadvantaging others.

For over two decades, policymakers in the United States and other jurisdictions have looked to 'non-system actors', comprehensive school reform models, and privately financed foundations to lead school change efforts (see Coburn, 2005; Honig, 2004; Meyerson and Wernick, 2012; Watkins, 2011). There is no similar 'school reform industry' (Rowan, 2002) in Ontario, which is one indication that the movement towards greater market competition in public education is neither inevitable nor necessary for change and reform to take place.

But the absence of outside actors has consequences for advocacy in Toronto, leaving the Ministry of Education (or, more locally, the TDSB) to serve as both engine for change and proponent of the status quo. Stated another way: can a system that has produced the stratification of educational opportunity, for generations, fix that same problem? If government is in the school improvement business here, how do advocates convince government that streaming warrants the same kind of attention and resources, the same pressures and supports, received by early years literacy or high school graduation rates – both of which, according to official statistics at least, have improved dramatically over the last decade?

Addressing the negative impacts of streaming is not only a question of getting the issue on the government's agenda. It is also a question of articulating an alternative. The TDSB is a behemoth, and streaming within its schools demonstrably makes outcomes worse for some students. A 'one best system' with no academic differentiation would generate a host of political and logistical challenges, as experiments with de-streaming at a smaller scale have shown. There are at least two different kinds of paths through this problem for advocates for change: one is to leave the structure of streaming more or less alone, but to try to make it work better for currently marginalized students, through some combination of information, recruitment, and support; the other alternative is to dismantle it. If advocates choose the former, then we need a better idea of the processes that serve as gatekeepers to student success. (Is it teacher misidentification? Is it family or peer knowledge of the consequences of streaming? Is it school-level pipelines or something else?) If the way out of the streaming problem is by doing away with it entirely or in part, then the conversation needs to shift towards investments in the 'technical core' of teaching and learning in order not to reproduce in a de-streamed environment precisely the outcomes seen in a streamed one (see Rubin, 2008).

There are numerous positive results that have emerged from many of the initiatives identified above, in terms of more equitable access to greater resources and improved student achievement. Model Schools for Inner Cities (MSIC), as well as Parent and Family Literacy Centres (PFLC), have documented exciting increases in parent and community engagement, student achievement and well-being, and have been demonstrated to be critical supports for families newly arriving in Canada. The inclusion initiative has only recently been adopted and, like the MSIC and PFLC supports, is primarily targeting the elementary panel. While these interventions attempt to create a more equitable schooling environment for younger children, they do not address the structural issues embedded within the secondary panel, nor the increasingly precarious relationship between secondary programming and post-secondary access. Students may be better prepared upon arrival, but as the data suggest, marginalized communities are still vulnerable to the structural violence embedded within the secondary system. Schooling systems in Toronto have a long-standing history of streaming and inequity and it seems unlikely that sustainable equity could be achieved without re-envisioning how constructs of ability are shaped by extrinsic characteristics (race, immigration, language, class), and subsequently organized across academic opportunities.

Shifting historically rooted and often celebrated programme structures is no small feat. Streaming is popular, in particular, with communities who are advantaged by the stratified system, which is the majority (roughly two-thirds) of the secondary school population. As mentioned earlier, one structural initiative the TDSB has attempted to undertake is its move to greater

inclusion for students identified as having a special education need. While the overarching goal had been to reduce the proportion of students in segregated classes by 50 per cent over three years, the initiative was met with extreme resistance, particularly from teachers and parents. Even though 50 per cent was the end goal, the initiative started small by identifying only 15 per cent of (or roughly 400) students in segregated placements (Grades 1–3) who had been identified as having a learning disability, mild intellectual disability, or behaviour disorder. Despite the extensive communication campaign, research dissemination, professional development, and community consultation, less than 10 per cent opted to move. The following year, 2015/16, the initiative was attempted again, with over 1,500 students (Grades 4–8) recommended to move to an inclusive placement for 2016/17. Campaigns to undermine the board's attempt for greater inclusion arose from parent and educator communities alike. The collective resistance resulted in a less than 1 per cent move to inclusive placements. There appears to be continued public support for initiatives that bring and redistribute resources to perceived areas of need, exemplified by the LOI tool as well as the MSCI and PFLC programmes. However, when structural change for greater inclusion is attempted, public support stops short. Keenly aware of the public and educator community's support for a stratified system, it would take notable courage and perseverance to address the long-standing issue of streaming.

Our paper has made a contribution to the literature on schooling in global cities by providing a snapshot of the organization of opportunity for students in the TDSB. The next step is greater, fine-grained examination of the mechanisms that shape those outcomes, and that explain how students are directed to some courses of study and not others. How a public system grapples with this provides insight into schooling as both a public and a private good.

Notes

1. By comparison, the 'Greater Toronto Area' (GTA), comprising the city and the four regional municipalities surrounding it, had a 2011 total population of over 6 million, making it the fourth most populous city in North America, after Mexico City, New York, and Los Angeles (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toronto>).
2. Given the history of immigration to Canada, Cantonese as well as Mandarin are common Chinese languages in Toronto. However, 'Chinese' is the term used by the TDSB in its surveys.
3. Some aspects of the programme and data descriptions are taken from Parekh (2014).
4. Data source Parekh (2014).
5. Data source and analysis Parekh (2014).
6. Variables used in the LOI are derived through students' postal codes and connected to the Environics Analytics DemoStats 2013 database.

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