

Oversight Structures to Address Bullying in Schools: A Scoping Review

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McMaster University and HWDSB recognizes and acknowledges that it is located on the traditional territories of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee nations, and within the lands protected by the “Dish with One Spoon” wampum agreement. The Recommendation 10.3 Team recognizes our responsibility, as guests, to respect and honour the intimate relationship Indigenous peoples have to this land. An integral component of this review is to investigate how the oversight structure may aid in amplifying the voices of self-determination-seeking groups.

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1. Introduction

At the beginning of 2021, the Safe Schools: Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel (hereafter referred to as the review panel) released the “Building Healthy Relationships and an Inclusive, Caring Learning Environment: Final Report of the HWDSB Safe Schools Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel” (hereafter referred to the Final Report of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel) to produce recommendations for the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB), the community, and the government to address bullying in schools.¹

Bullying is defined as aggression that is intentional, repetitive, and involves an imbalance of power.¹⁻² It takes on many forms, including physical, verbal, social, cyber, racial, religious, sexual, and disability, which makes it difficult to determine a single solution³ Bullying is an issue at the system-level and is found in settings across Canada, including HWDSB.¹ According to the 2020 HWDSB survey for the Final Report of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel, almost 60% of students reported being bullied, and nearly 20% reported being bullied frequently.⁴ In the academic literature, bullying has been linked to poor effects on children’s mental and physical health, including increased depression and social anxiety when compared to non-victimized peers, as well as economic difficulties and reduced quality of life in later years.^{2,5} Perpetrators of bullying are also found to have worse physical and mental health.⁵

1.1 The current review

Recommendation 10.3 of the Final Report of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel concerns the creation of an independent, community-led structure that would oversee implementation and progress of the report’s recommendations at the highest level:

Establish a community-led, independent table with broad representation, including from HWDSB, to oversee implementation of review panel recommendations at the highest level. This entity should also identify and address barriers to school-community working relationships that are specific to bullying prevention and intervention and overall student well-being. Ensure the entity's terms of reference give it moral authority for and public recognition of its oversight role without impinging on the board's authority. Consider building upon existing community structures that bring together a range of partners to address the health and well-being of children and youth in Hamilton.⁶

This oversight structure is one part of a larger body of several groups working to implement various Safe Schools interventions within HWDSB. The specific purpose of the structure from Recommendation 10.3 is to oversee the overall progress of the Safe Schools initiative, rather than implementing initiatives of its own.

The purpose of this scoping review is to assess the literature to develop evidence-informed considerations for the aforementioned oversight structure.

1.2 Background research

Prior to the scoping review, a preliminary search was conducted on current and pre-existing anti-bullying structures in Hamilton, with specific focus on the Hamilton Coalition for Bullying Prevention and Intervention (hereafter referred to as the Hamilton Coalition for short), an alliance aimed at preventing and eliminating bullying in Hamilton.⁷ The Hamilton Coalition operated from 2002 and whose last known activity to the authors was in 2014.⁷⁻⁸ The organization was composed of 25 organizations and structured as follows: a steering committee, two advisory committees (Youth Advisory, Parent Advisory) that each met monthly, and general

members.⁹⁻¹² The Youth Advisory included high school students from the public and Catholic school boards, and conducted school-wide initiatives to raise awareness about bullying.^{10,13} The Parent Advisory was intended to represent parents' voices.¹⁴ The Hamilton Coalition had an annual planning and review process, and decision-making was determined through members' votes.¹² Throughout its operation, the organization engaged in various initiatives that included, but are not limited to, a widespread anti-bullying campaign (titled "It's Cool to Care"), bullying awareness presentations in and outside of schools, forums, and other events that partnered with the community.¹⁵ During its operation, the Hamilton Coalition collaborated with Mac-CURA, a team of researchers and community partners that conducted research projects on bullying and published findings on a publicly accessible website.^{9,16}

The authors investigated three local bullying prevention and intervention advocacy groups that provided input to the Final Report of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel: Nick's Journey, 999th Legion for Child Rights, and Voices Against Bullying; as well as a national research hub with best practices to address bullying known as PREVNet.¹⁷⁻²⁰ Background research provided the authors with an understanding of the previous work into Safe Schools, as well as a foundation for considerations while conducting a search into the literature surrounding bullying oversight structures.

2. Methods and Results

2.1 Academic literature

Reviewing existing academic literature involved defining inclusion criteria a priori (see: Table 1). Four databases (EBSCOhost, Web of Science, ERIC, and PsycInfo) were searched to yield 1711 results using the search string outlined in Figure 1. In the first screening, each author independently screened the titles and abstracts of half of the total results. Any article identified to meet the inclusion criteria by one author was assessed by the other author to determine eligibility, and the decision to move the article to the next screening phase was reached by consensus. 76 articles were moved into the full-text review.

In the next screening stage for full-text, Dulai and Khairi assessed all articles against the inclusion criteria. An article was included by consensus by Dulai and Khairi. Of the 76 articles, 22 were moved into the data extraction phase, which involved independently identifying emerging themes (see: Table 2). Themes were consolidated through discussion between the primary authors and other members of the Recommendation 10.3 Team. Duplicates in search results were manually removed in both the title and abstract review, as well as full-text review steps.

In addition to the predefined search, reference lists of articles were searched if the article itself mentioned the key terms ‘evaluate’, ‘monitor’, ‘assess’ or ‘implement’ in the context of bullying program fidelity or process. Also, if an article was focused on a program, a Google search was conducted and the first relevant result was reviewed against the predefined inclusion criteria, excluding criteria 6.

Table 1. Inclusion criteria and corresponding justification for academic literature search.

Criteria	Justification
1. It can inform a community oversight structure.	The purpose of this review is to identify evidence-informed considerations for the development of an oversight structure for various approaches to address bullying.
2. Application in/to a school setting (K-12).	The oversight structure should be relevant to the HWDSB; recovered information should reflect application at the K-12 level.
3. Unrelated to policing.	This criteria was defined as a result of previous work, which established that police presence in HWDSB schools made Black, Indigenous and racialized students feel targeted and uncomfortable in the school environment. ²¹ The decision to end the police liaison program was supported by Trustees in June of 2020. ²¹
4. Applied bullying measurement scales.	This criteria was defined to identify the application of bullying measurement scales across school settings.
5. Geographic location: Canada, or USA.	Feasible search restriction for the volume of information recovered in each search.
6. Timeframe: 2018 or newer.	Feasible time restriction for the volume of information recovered in each search.
7. Language: published in English.	Feasible language restriction for the volume and accessibility of information recovered in each search.

Figure 1. Flowchart for article selection in academic literature.

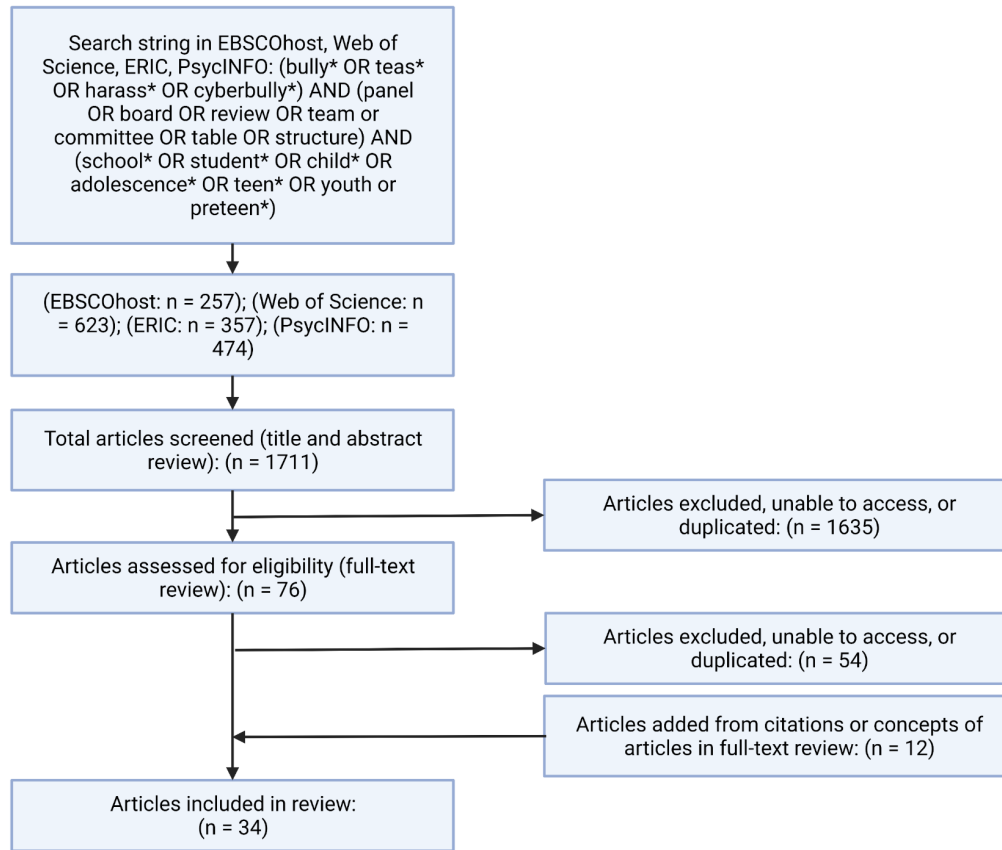


Table 2. Themes and corresponding article results for academic literature search.

Theme	Article Reference Number(s)
Organizational Considerations	22, 23, 24, 25, 26
Partnership with Community	24, 25, 26, 27
Amplifying Voices from Groups at Higher Risk of Bullying Victimization	28, 29, 30
Potential Stakeholders	22, 23, 24, 25, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36
Measurement Systems	22, 27, 28, 29, 31, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50
Training	31, 35, 36, 46, 51
Assessing Effectiveness of the	22, 23

Oversight Structure	
Challenges and Facilitators of Implementation	29, 46, 52, 53

2.2 Grey literature

The same approach to the academic literature was undertaken with the grey literature. Inclusion criteria was determined a priori (see: Table 3). One database (Nexis Uni) was searched using the search string outlined in Figure 2, yielding 644 results. In the first screening for title and abstracts, each author reviewed half of the total articles. Articles identified by one author for inclusion were rated by the other author for inclusion. Only articles meeting eligibility by both Dulai and Khairi were moved into full-text review.

Of the 90 articles moved to full-text, 21 were excluded as not meeting the inclusion criteria after discussion and consensus by both Dulai and Khairi. The remaining 69 articles were independently extracted for data and emergent themes, which were determined through discussion between Dulai and Khairi and with other members of the Recommendation 10.3 Team (see: Table 4). Duplicates were manually removed in each step of the process.

Although inspection of references was not conducted in the grey literature, further investigation into certain concepts was conducted. That is, if an article mentioned a concept unknown to the authors (i.e., Middle Years Development Instrument), a search into Google Scholar was conducted to find the first relevant result, which was then reviewed for inclusion based on the predefined criteria, excluding criteria 5.

Table 3. Inclusion criteria and corresponding justification for grey literature search.

Criteria	Justification
1. It can inform a community oversight structure.	See corresponding criteria’s justification in Table 1.

<p>2. Application in/to a school setting (K-12).</p>	<p>See corresponding criteria’s justification in Table 1.</p>
<p>3. Unrelated to policing.</p>	<p>See corresponding criteria’s justification in Table 1.</p>
<p>4. Geographic location: Public school board in Central, Southern, or Western Ontario, with a student population the same size or larger as HWDSB; or corresponding Catholic school board of that jurisdiction.</p>	<p>First defined Ontario as the area of focus, as HWDSB is located within the province. School board regions within Ontario chosen for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● HWDSB is in the Southern Region. ● Upon recommendation by other members of the Recommendation 10.3 Team, Toronto District School Board and Thames Valley District School Board were searched, as well as other school boards in the Regions they belonged to (Central and Western, respectively).
<p>5. Timeframe: 2018 or newer.</p>	<p>See corresponding criteria’s justification in Table 1.</p>
<p>6. Language: published in English.</p>	<p>See corresponding criteria’s justification in Table 1.</p>

Figure 2. Flowchart for article selection in grey literature.

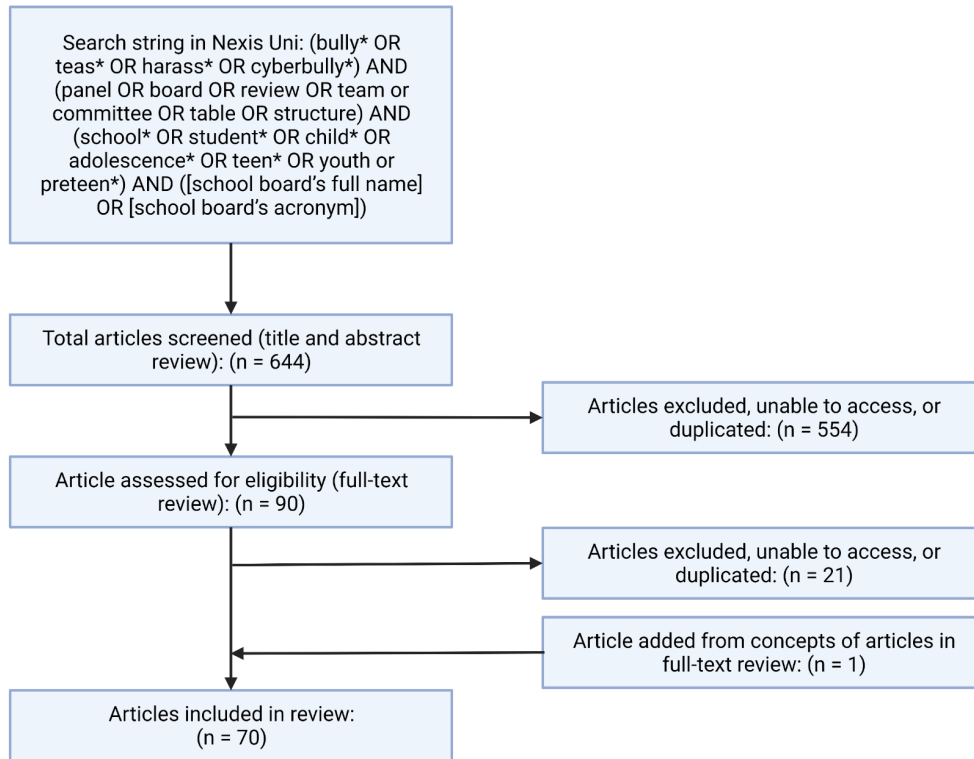


Table 4. Themes and corresponding article results for grey literature search.

Theme	Articles (in numbered form)
Community Oversight in the Context of Hamilton	54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70
Accountability from School Board to Public	65, 67, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85
External Reviewer	54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 69, 70, 74, 80, 81, 82, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94
Potential Stakeholders	95, 96
Measurement Systems	80, 83, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102
Culture and Policies Around Reporting Bullying and Other Incidents in a School Setting	64, 72, 74, 88, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108

Addressing Multiple Perspectives and Transparent Communication	79, 84, 90, 94, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119
Amplifying Voices from Equity-Seeking and Self-Determination-Seeking Groups	64, 76, 78, 89, 90, 91, 118, 120, 121, 122, 123
Handling of Public Incidents by Other School Boards	94, 119

3. Discussion

3.1 Academic literature themes

Organizational Considerations

A meeting timeline that could be replicated by the oversight structure is from a community-based organization, the Education Community Action Forums for Excellence (CAFE), that held regular meetings, and used the first few meetings as a set-up to establish the purpose of the organization and clarify roles.²² Additionally, the Education CAFE held meetings in various locations outside of school grounds, which could also be a consideration for the oversight structure as it is rooted in community.²²

With regards to the proceedings of the meetings, time permitting, the agenda could be designed to provide ample opportunity for individuals to speak if they would like.²² Within that, there could be situations where large or small group discussion may be more beneficial.²² For example, smaller groups may allow individual members to feel more comfortable speaking out.²² This feature may be especially pertinent if there are power dynamics present, such as between a member of the oversight structure who is a student and another who is a teacher; however, larger groups may be more efficient and be able to ensure all members receive the same amount of information. In making decisions, an approach guided by cooperation, as opposed to competition, and problem-solving, as opposed to fault-finding, could better facilitate the goal of addressing bullying to make schools a safer place for students and other parties.²³ Moreover, although decisions by voting may be utilized more widely for purposes of time and efficiency, consensus could have a place in community-based structures like the oversight structure, as the decision-making approach requires listening and empathy between individuals and groups with different views.²³ During the decision-making process, however, stakeholders may find

themselves in conflict with each other.²⁴ Such an issue may be of concern to the oversight structure, especially since the structure is overseeing recommendations for bullying, which can be a personal subject matter. In preparation, there could be plans in place to address this before they happen.²⁵

In the literature, rotating leadership has been used in another community-based organization as a way to prevent specific individuals from leading (i.e., distribute power and roles) and also encourage other individuals from the structure to engage in leadership roles.²² The concept of rotating leadership could even be extended to a wider concept of rotating members of the oversight structure itself. Further, although the oversight structure may consist of more stable members, there are ways to gather input from the wider community, including hosting open hearings, public events, surveys.²² This could have the added benefit of demonstrating to the wider community apart from the oversight structure that work is being done *with* them and generate buy-in by allowing them to be part of and observe the progress being made.

As there will be a range of technical expertise between members of the oversight structure, it is important that data is presented in an appropriate manner for all members to be able to understand the information.^{22,26} For example, graphs could be used instead of tables or lists.²²

An additional consideration is based on the fact that there are evident mental health links to bullying.²⁴ Thus, there could be the inclusion of the oversight structure overseeing mental health initiatives or, even more broadly, to other school goals and programs as well. For example, in Comer's School Development Program, a form of an oversight structure called the School Planning and Management Team was established to monitor progress of programs aimed at improving academic achievement.²³

Partnership with Community

Being a community-based oversight structure, it may be useful for the structure to disseminate information of progress to the wider community. A few examples of how this may be accomplished is through handbooks, leaflets, letters, websites, and the media.^{24-25,27}

As community members will be a part of the oversight structure, general considerations to be made include: multiple forms of communication to address accessibility (e.g., considering access to Internet, translations into different languages, assistance in reading written materials), addressing barriers to participation (e.g., childcare or activities for child and youth, transportation), and whether timing of meetings are appropriate for community members.²⁶ For example, meetings in late afternoon or evenings may be more convenient for some members of the oversight structure, but could be exclusionary to others.²⁶ If appropriate, a potential solution could be to hold multiple meetings to ensure equitable participation.²⁶

Amplifying Voices from Groups at Higher Risk of Bullying Victimization

As mentioned previously, bullying has racial, religious, sexual, and disability subtypes.³ Through our research, identified populations that may be at higher risk for being bullied include children on the autism spectrum, and individuals of racial or ethnic minorities.²⁸⁻²⁹ As well, the research highlighted the following as groups of special consideration: ethnic, sexual, and religious minorities; individuals with disabilities (including, but not limited to, physical, mental, cognitive and learning); refugees and migrants; individuals experiencing homelessness; and perpetrators of bullying.³⁰

After identification of special consideration groups, the oversight structure can take steps to amplify the voices of these individuals, of whom bullying can have a direct impact upon. One such strategy based on the literature is that if an individual belongs to a minority group, having

other individuals who share their background may help to allow them to feel greater acceptance.²⁹ Specifically, a study found that a class with more Black students led to those students feeling more accepted within the classroom.²⁹ A point that arises from this strategy is that it may allow for wider perspectives from the group, as it may not be appropriate to have one individual of an identity speak for the entire group of which they belong. Secondly, increasing awareness of and affirming the cultural values of minority groups may facilitate the creation of a more accepting setting for these individuals.²⁹ Both strategies may allow minority group members on the oversight structure to be more comfortable in sharing their thoughts.

Potential Stakeholders

Examples of stakeholders involved in the literature surrounding bullying can be organized into the following categories:

- Family and Close Ones: students (e.g., victims), parents or caregivers, grandparents, siblings, neighbours;
- School: administrators, teachers and special education teachers, non-teaching staff (e.g., counselors or mental health professionals, nurses, bus drivers, coaches, cafeteria workers, playground monitors, school resource officers);
- Community: nongovernmental organizations, policy makers, healthcare providers, influentials, community leaders, religious leaders, volunteers.^{22-25,31-36}

With any potential stakeholders, however, it's important to consider that the structure is community-based; therefore, it may be beneficial for the members of the oversight structure to approve members of a particular occupation, especially when enlisting individuals who are not from the direct community, such as an independent party or an outside researcher.

Measurement Systems

The role of the independent community oversight structure would likely not entail data collection. Rather, the development of the structure would include utilizing data collected by the lead implementation body, which, in the case of Recommendation 10.3, is the HWDSB. However, measurement systems are important to consider because the oversight structure may aid in identifying key outcomes and indicators related to bullying and bullying related initiatives, in order to track their progress.

Should the oversight structure be involved in assessing the effectiveness of interventions based on the review panel's report and recommendations, factors to examine may include acceptability of implementation, sustainability, financial costs and benefits, and fidelity.^{31,37-38} Specifically, implementation fidelity is associated with positive outcomes and could be assessed by those implementing the recommendation (e.g., teachers), or by an external rater.³⁸⁻⁴⁰ The school prevention program, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, uses the School-wide Evaluation Tool to assess program fidelity, which uses a cut-off of 80% to deem a program as meeting expectations.⁴⁰

The application of a consistent measurement system is one way to standardize how bullying interventions are assessed by the oversight structure. With a consistent measurement system, there is potential to identify gaps and compare the effectiveness of interventions.^{35,41} The selected system should be adaptable, to account for the dynamic nature of bullying and the various social contexts in which it occurs. In some cases, it may be appropriate to account for variances in the analysis phase by disaggregating the data.²² In the scope of our search, it was determined that bullying related factors may be significantly influenced by grade level, sex, gender, race, ethnicity, immigrant status, and home or neighbourhood environment.^{29,31,42-44} Therefore, stratifying according to one or a few of these factors, depending on the appropriate

methodology, could be an important aspect of interpreting results obtained via a given measurement system. While it is ideal to use a consistent measurement system, it may not be appropriate to do so in all cases. For instance, children on the autism spectrum may have bullying-related experiences that are not capturable through expansive tools.²⁸

Accordingly, collecting different *forms* of information, including qualitative and quantitative data, can allow for a more holistic understanding of bullying related topics and account for the limitations that may arise from using one type of data. In particular, qualitative data is important in highlighting participation from students, who have important perspectives on what categories are included in the measurement systems (e.g., what indicators may or may not be meaningful), as well as in the analysis and interpretation of data, since the group is most directly impacted by the Safe Schools project. In the literature, the following topics were assessed using a combined qualitative and quantitative approach: bullying behaviours, attitudes, school climate, bullying frequency and intensity, perceived school safety, intentionality, and power differentials.^{41,45-46}

The selected measurement system should be validated before use and may depend on the best-practice for a given application. Assessment forms may include one or some of the following: scales, surveys, questionnaires, reports, field observation, focus groups, interviews, audiovisual recordings, vignettes, and audits.^{29,34-35,45,47-48} Systems are subject to different biases, and to varying degrees. For instance, recall bias may be of concern with retrospective surveys, whereas social desirability bias may be of concern with interviews that are not anonymous.³¹ For such reasons, employing multiple measurement systems in parallel can allow for complemented use, where the deficiencies in one tool are compensated for by another tool.³¹ In addition to using multiple measurement systems to account for bias, having various parties apply the tool can

allow for a more representative outcome, as stakeholders have different experiences and insights related to bullying.³⁶ In the literature, measurement tools were used by students, teachers, parents, school administrators, and staff.^{36,39,45} It is imperative to consider that varying definitions may contribute to differences in the way a system is used. Consistent, comprehensive definitions are important to define before the application of the tool.⁴⁹

Frequency of measurement is an important consideration in the assessment of bullying interventions. Annual, comparative pre- and post-, and predefined time point reporting have been used.^{27,31,35,45,49-50} Multiple post tests are recommended in cases where it is important to observe change over a period of time or at specific milestones. Making collected data publicly available is an important consideration in ensuring transparency.⁴⁹

Training

Informed use application and use of measurement tools requires training. There are various considerations in implementing training programs, including continuity and assessment. Continuity may take the form of annual training, training renewal or check-ins at various time points.^{27,51} Assessment may include attendance, progress logs, and meeting a checklist of relevant criteria at the individual or organization levels to determine impact of training.^{36,46} Methods of training range, including, but not limited to, in-person, virtual, or telephone sessions.³¹⁻³² The latter point of remote delivery of training is especially relevant given the COVID-19 pandemic, with physical distancing becoming a consideration of training programs. The cascade training model may be of interest, as the method was used in other bullying interventions, such as the No Bully System and Viennese Social Competence.^{35,46}

Assessing Effectiveness of the Oversight Structure

In assessing the effectiveness of the oversight structure itself, evaluations may be conducted at the end of a school cycle and executed as reflections or questionnaires, as was found in the literature.²²⁻²³ Reflections may be personal or run in large groups and are generally a more qualitative measurement.²² Questionnaires could be qualitative or quantitative depending on structure, but potential items of interest may include: openness of communication; if decision-making was applicable to the situation (e.g., consensus versus majority); commitment levels of members; degree to which members were included in decision-making; and extent of inclusion based on culture, race, and other factors.²³

Challenges and Facilitators of Implementation

Proactive consideration of challenges and facilitators to bullying oversight structures creates the opportunity for smoother implementation.

Challenges identified in the literature include scheduling constraints and conflicts, staff turnover, fatigue, burnout, unanticipated events, and administrative changes.^{46,52-53} Scheduling constraints, often due to varying demands throughout the year, result in inconsistent efforts put toward the initiative, making it difficult for those involved to find a sense of rhythm.⁵² Although it is important for the oversight structure to ensure their schedule fits with and works for all of its members, members also have a commitment to keep with the schedule to allow for smooth and continuous progress.⁴⁹ Staff turnover, fatigue and burnout relate to the varying levels of commitment to the potential success of the intervention or oversight model.⁵²⁻⁵³ Limited staff, and resources, can increase individual workload, further contributing to turnover, fatigue, and burnout.⁵² Unanticipated events, such as extreme weather, and unanticipated changes, including changes to school demographics such that the implemented structure is no longer a good fit, can be harder to mitigate through planning.⁴⁹ Administrative changes can occur with relatively short

notice in some cases; this may be of particular concern when the new administration is not invested in previously established goals or initiatives.⁵²⁻⁵³

Facilitators of implementation include meaningful endorsement, collaboration, role-setting, positive dynamics, access to resources, and evidence-informed approaches.^{29,52-53} Endorsement is meaningful when it supports the goal of the structure and involves consistent, accessible communication, and it can take different forms, including active involvement, tangible support, and public support.⁵²⁻⁵³ Collaboration and role-setting are important to create a sense of belonging and importance for each member of the team, and avoid diffusion of responsibility.⁵² Positive dynamics may be created through meetings that prioritize interactivity, flexibility, and iteration through feedback.⁵² Resources, both human and non-human, create logistical capacity.⁵² Finally, evidence informed approaches, often based on theory, are more likely to produce successful outcomes.²⁹

3.2 Grey literature themes

Community Oversight in the Context of Hamilton

The first theme relates to the background of the oversight structure, which was evident through the literature, for the importance and desire of the community to be involved in addressing bullying in schools.⁵⁴⁻⁶⁶ When community members did provide input, although it was perhaps more time-consuming, they found verbal communication in large groups a more valuable form of sharing to written communication in small groups.⁶⁶ It is to be noted, however, that this format may not always be applicable, as this preference for large-group verbal communication occurred when parents were sharing personal stories of their childrens' bullying experiences. This brings up an important point that bullying is a sensitive topic, and it may be a consideration for the operation of the oversight structure to anticipate such a situation.⁶⁶

A concern that came from the community through sessions with the review panel is that while it is disappointing that the need to address bullying was only taken seriously by the board following a student's death, it still remains an important mission moving forward.^{59,67-70}

Accountability from School Board to Public

During the investigation by the review panel, the grey literature revealed the public did not feel that the board was taking the issue seriously enough, even with assurances from the board that they would address the issue accordingly.^{67,71} This perceived inadequacy of action was not just limited to bullying however, but also in other incidents, such as allegations of racism against the board.⁷² Specifically, the public's distrust of HWDSB can be illustrated through the history of how the board has addressed events in the past. In 2015, the ReImagine initiatives were rolled out as a way of giving the board a fresh start.⁷³ Yet with the release of the interim bullying report in 2020 and the racism report following shortly after, it follows that the grey literature would be permeated with a sentiment of distrust.⁷³ There appears to be a disconnect between the board's perception of either a lack of an issue or a belief that the issue has been properly addressed, while the public deems the opposite.⁷⁴

Thus, when the board asserts it will address bullying in schools, it is met with some measure of skepticism and doubt, which in part may be attributed to following: a lack of action to engage meaningfully with community, inauthenticity when reporting to the public, public fatigue from promises to do better that never come to fruition, and greater transparency in dealings that concern the public.^{65,73,75-77} The lack of public trust is not only limited to HWDSB, but other school boards as well. The lessons from those cases is that a changing administration at the principal level may hinder the process of building trust with the community, and also that both traditional media and social media could act as a place for accountability.^{75-76,78--80}

In addressing these, timely public statements or disclosures could be a way to provide a space for the public to monitor progress, as well as provide them with assurance that the board is committed to addressing the issue and that the issue will not be brushed aside.^{59,80-82} Communication, however, implies two sides, and thus having the public provide their input would also be important for the oversight structure. As the structure is based in community, there could be a consideration for the general public who are not specifically members of the oversight structure to provide their input, in order to allow for greater accountability. This may be collected through methods such as letters, petitions, or conferences with students.⁸³⁻⁸⁴ Finally, producing and demonstrating results sooner rather than later demonstrates goodwill from the side of the school board in taking real action to address an important issue such as bullying.⁸⁵

External Reviewer

Related to the theme of accountability is the involvement of an external reviewer, which could provide objectivity into the process by a third party. External and independent experts are not only recruited to investigate issues in school boards by HWDSB, but also by the Peel District School Board (PDSB), the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), the Toronto Catholic District School Board, and the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) in recent years.^{54-66,70,74,80,86-90} Although these reviewers were only engaged during the review process, considering their expertise and experience in the field, they could have a continued participation in monitoring progress, especially with regards to implementation fidelity of recommendations, or as an advisor to provide feedback on the original vision of the recommendations. Alternatively, other independent experts, whether with regards to the issue (i.e., bullying) or the logistics of the oversight structure itself, could be a potential stakeholder. An example of an expert on the issue are researchers at PREVNet, who have partnered with Durham District

School Board on anti-bullying initiatives.⁸³ As well, although the provincial government typically does not intrude into school board jurisdiction, external reviewers have included those appointed by the Ministry of Education, as was the case in the PDSB's probe into racism on the board.⁹¹⁻⁹⁴ However, as mentioned above in the academic literature, it may be helpful for oversight structure members to discuss and approve such stakeholders. Simultaneously, it may be important for the oversight structure members to acknowledge that independent experts recruited to provide advice and guidance will have their own biases and intentions. That is, conflict of interest may exist even with external reviewers, which was a concern brought up in the literature.⁸¹ More broadly, given the nature of a community-based structure, there will be biases, as community work represents a common interest.

Potential Stakeholders

Potential locations and times for bullying include buses and lunchtime.⁹⁵⁻⁹⁶ Both situations are highlighted by the community as areas of potential bullying outside of instructional time. These concerns correlate with the findings of the HWDSB Safe School Survey, wherein 32% and 63% of students reported feeling unsafe on the bus, and during breaks and recess, respectively.¹ The Final Report of the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Review Panel states educational resources should be shared with non-teaching staff, including bus drivers and crossing guards, but these individuals could also be considered a stakeholder on the community oversight structure.¹ Furthermore, lunchtime monitors range from teachers to staff, but they may also include hired employees.⁹⁶ If so, these may also be a potential stakeholder to consider.

Measurement Systems

An oversight structure will inevitably be provided with measurements on the progress of recommendation implementation, as well as the recommendations' effectiveness in addressing

bullying. These reports to the oversight structure are useful, as measurements can demonstrate gaps in the implementation of recommendation and provide incentive to address those gaps. For example, a survey by the Durham Catholic District School Board revealed that students and parents were unaware of an anonymous bullying reporting tool on school websites.⁹⁷ This lack of knowledge could potentially have led to the consequent under-usage of the tool.

When measuring incidents of bullying, tools should not only speak to frequency, but also severity of bullying.⁹⁸ Further, when measuring bullying, certain measurement systems capture a wider range of related factors, which may reveal correlations between bullying and said variables.^{83,99} For example, the Middle Years Develop Instrument (MDI) survey reports student's social responsibility, peer belonging, and school climate, among other variables.¹⁰⁰ In a study validating usage of the MDI, "bullying victimization" showed negative correlation with "school belonging" and "school supportiveness," demonstrating the latter factors as possible targets of focus to prevent bullying.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the survey includes bullying as a piece in the wider assessment, and not as the main focus of measurement.¹⁰⁰ The MDI is an example of leveraging existing tools. Another existing tool to consider capitalizing upon is the Student Census, whereupon there may be opportunities to link data from the MDI to the census for the oversight structure to better understand how students' identities are impacted by bullying.

Multiple types of reports and scales used to track the progress of each recommendation's implementation and effectiveness. However, if there is too much inconsistency between measurement systems, such as definitions of common terms (e.g., distinguishing bullying from aggression), tracking of progress may be impeded as one tool identifies progress while another does not.¹⁰¹ For example, on a smaller scale, the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board found that similar infractions earning suspension were coded differently based on

principal, leading to inconsistency in data categorization.¹⁰¹ Such inconsistencies in tracking make it difficult to identify trends and accurately monitor progress. When extrapolating to an oversight structure, there could be consideration for reporting tools to have similar features that can allow for comparison of progress *across* recommendations. Another lesson from the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board is that annual monitoring of tools may have contributed to the identification of a gap that there were inconsistencies in their suspension coding system; therefore, in tools used to report to the oversight structure, monitoring of the tools themselves may be considered.¹⁰¹

Digitization of reports and consistent communication in reporting may also streamline processes and ensure information is not lost.^{80,102} Tracking change annually could allow for quicker and more accurate discernment of trends and progress over time.⁸³

Culture and Policies Around Reporting Bullying and Other Incidents in a School Setting

In the grey literature, a clear theme of a culture of a fear to speak out about incidents (not just about bullying, but also racism) is present across multiple school boards, including but not limited to, HWDSB, TDSB, and TVDSB.^{64,74,88,103-106} One article reports that this culture of fear “normalizes bullying.”⁶⁴ References to a culture of silence at school boards were mostly voiced by employees (specifically, teachers), who felt that if they were to speak out, they may face “career derailment.”⁷² Implications for the oversight structure is that if administrative members from HWDSB, the community may not feel comfortable speaking out if they are employees or parents with children in HWDSB schools.

Although there is a culture of fear that should be addressed in the school board to ensure equitable partnership between HWDSB, their employees, and the community, another factor that may prevent staff from speaking up is the board’s lack of an effective whistleblower policy.

Without whistleblower protection, employees may be afraid to speak out about wrongdoing, which can only be the case when school boards warn employees that taking issues to the media will be viewed as criticism and result in harassment from human resources, which were concerns that arose from the literature.¹⁰⁵⁻¹⁰⁷ A whistleblower policy would not be used as a means of criticizing the board without bounds, but to bring to light instances where the typical means of reporting may not be applicable.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, HWDSB is in the midst of creating a whistleblower policy.^{106,108} However, there is an inference that in the time during which one does not exist, there may be individuals who do not feel comfortable holding the school board accountable to the public.

Addressing Multiple Perspectives and Transparent Communication

Community oversight structures should take into account the perspectives of various stakeholders. Conflict is to be expected when considering multiple perspectives, and consensus should be reached when possible. Sometimes, consensus may be challenged by power imbalances or bureaucratic structures. For instance, the Ontario Ministry of Education has more power than a school board, school, or teacher, when it comes to deciding aspects of the teaching curriculum. The notion of navigating stakeholder perspectives to arrive at a decision is illustrated by Robin Pilkey – TDSB Chair – and her response to curriculum backlash: “We are obligated, regardless of what the topic is, to teach the Ontario curriculum [...] we also have an obligation to our students.”¹⁰⁹ Pilkey encouraged parents and others interested to contribute during consultations the government promised to hold, adding that if people do not, the sessions would “be hijacked by special interest groups.”¹⁰⁹ This approach is demonstrative of the importance of supporting the involvement of multiple perspectives, even if they have less assertive power. In some cases, conflict may not be resolved through consensus. This may be particularly true with

topics where deep-rooted or polarizing views often exist, such as with the sexual education curriculum.⁸⁴ Navigating such conflict requires careful consideration about how parties can co-exist, without becoming pitted against one another. Anonymous complaint websites, specifically those for parents to submit complaints against teachers, have been noted to create unproductive polarization.^{79,110-111} Overall, it's important to acknowledge conflict and navigate it such that it does not become a distractor to the intended goal or purpose of the initiative.^{79,112}

The grey literature search emphasized the importance of clear communication with the public when it comes to topics that involve multiple perspectives. Transparent communication creates accountable governance as the process of taking stakeholder perspectives into account is made public.^{110,113-115} Additionally, this type of communication allows for a coordinated approach to solving issues, where stakeholders are working together toward a common goal.^{90,94,116-119}

Amplifying Voices from Equity-Seeking and Self-Determination-Seeking Groups

It is important to proactively recognize that some individuals face an increased susceptibility to bullying based on their identity. While not an exhaustive list, the grey literature revealed that Black, racial minority, and LGBTQ+ students fall under this category.^{64,76,91} Groups that have faced historical disadvantages deserve specific responses to bullying experiences. In the development of such responses, the idea of intersectionality is essential to consider, to avoid generalization and harmful assumptions.⁹⁰⁻⁹¹ Additionally, reports on initiatives, with permission from those who participated, that are made available to the public can further contribute to a sense of validation and accountability.⁸⁹

Engaging in discussions with individuals who face bullying due to their identity is an important part of developing a response, and can be done through partnering with more knowledgeable organizations. For instance, the Hamilton Centre for Civic Inclusion and

Hamilton Students for Justice, along with other partner organizations, invited Black high school students to partake in conversations around bullying, racism, mental health, and COVID-19, to learn more about their experiences, reasoning that, “Rather than telling Black students what they need, Black students can tell us what they need.”¹²⁰ Conversations about discrimination and racism should include members of the affected communities and must be ongoing.^{78,118} In such discussions, there should be a concerted effort to ensure action plans are not based on outdated information.¹²¹ It is also important to ensure that students feel safe in sharing their perspectives, especially when doing so requires deviation from Eurocentric norms.^{76,91,122} Creating a welcoming space may take the form of visible symbols, such as pins, stickers, and flags, so that students know their identity is valued.^{121,123}

Another aspect of accountability to change exists in the idea of acknowledging that there is an issue. In some cases, it has been noted that authority figures, such as teachers and administrators, did not address bullying related violence in any capacity. Such was the case in Brampton, where “factional violence amongst South Asian communities [...] of the north Brampton Punjabi community [was ignored or treated indifferently by teachers and administrators].”⁹⁰ In a similar sense, when administrations do not create a welcoming space for individuals to share or provide necessary information to do so, it can prevent or prolong individuals from sharing their story. In one instance, Black community members were denied from making a presentation at a Peel board meeting because their request was not made five days in advance as per existing rules, which were not made aware to the Black community members previously.⁷⁸

Handling of Public Incidents by Other School Boards

While the grey literature search did not reveal an existing bullying oversight structure on which the proposed response to recommendation 10.3 could be based, communication between school boards and the public following major bullying related incidents provides insight into qualities that would be important to consider. Communication barriers related to timing and accessibility of information are among the top concerns that were revealed through the grey literature search.^{94,119} The issue of timing is multi-faceted. While it is important to collect information using a thorough and expansive approach, spending too much time doing so can prolong the time at which information is disseminated, creating a sense of stagnancy or frustration.⁹⁴ In some cases, urgency to meet deadlines can compromise the ability to hear from all stakeholders who are interested in making contributions, which can be especially detrimental when there are bullying events that have had tremendous impact on the community.⁹⁴ Accessibility of information – and accountability – increases when an external party is appointed to conduct a review about a bullying related event, which is made publicly available.¹¹⁹

3.3 Considerations for oversight structure

The purpose of the scoping review was to focus on considerations for oversight structures, but the authors recognized that the information could also be applicable to other bodies, such as the working groups in the Safe Schools project.

Refer to the corresponding discussion section for more details. Considerations labeled with an asterisk (*) are those which may be an area of interest, but examples to address them have not been found in the current review and/or require further research to determine effectiveness. The following headings and considerations are ordered by order of appearance in the text.

Format of Oversight Structure

Theme	Consideration
Organizational Considerations (Academic)	Holding regular meetings
Organizational Considerations (Academic)	Hosting meetings in alternate locations to suit the community's needs
Organizational Considerations (Academic)	Designing agenda with the intention to provide members with opportunity to participate and engage
Organizational Considerations (Academic)	Allocating time for small groups may allow facilitate more comfortable dialogue between members
Organizational Considerations (Academic)	Cooperation over competition, problem-solving over fault-finding
Organizational Considerations (Academic)	Consensus where/when applicable
Organizational Considerations (Academic)	Rotating leadership
Organizational Considerations (Academic)	Rotating members*
Organizational Considerations (Academic)	Gathering input from the wider community, other than just those on the oversight structure itself
Organizational Considerations (Academic)	Appropriate presentation of data for all members to understand
Organizational Considerations (Academic)	Potentially expanding a bullying oversight structure to mental health and/or other school-related initiatives (e.g., academic success)*
Partnership with Community (Academic)	Appropriate timing of meetings for members (e.g., time of day, one versus multiple meetings)
Challenges and Facilitators of Implementation (Academic)	Consideration of facilitators to implementation of oversight structure can include meaningful endorsement, collaboration, role-setting, positive dynamics, access to resources, and evidence-informed approaches

Communication

Theme	Consideration
Partnership with Community (Academic), Addressing Multiple Perspectives and Transparent Communication (Grey), Handling of Public Incidents by Other School Boards (Grey)	Transparent dissemination of information from the oversight structure to the public (e.g., through media, handbooks, leaflets, letters, websites), and transparent communication between members of the oversight structure itself*
Partnership with Community (Academic)	Balancing between taking too much time to create a comprehensive understanding of the situation to account for all viewpoints, and timely dissemination of information to the public demanding action*
Handling of Public Incidents by Other School Boards (Grey)	Balancing between taking too much time to create a comprehensive understanding of the situation to account for all viewpoints, and timely dissemination of information to the public demanding action*

Amplifying Voices

Theme	Consideration
Amplifying Voices from Groups at Higher Risk of Bullying Victimization (Academic), Amplifying Voices from Equity-Seeking and Self-Determination-Seeking Groups (Grey)	Creating a safe space for individuals from equity-seeking and self-determination-seeking groups to share their perspective, such as by having more than one individual of an identity, or increasing awareness and affirmation of groups’ cultural values
Amplifying Voices from Equity-Seeking and Self-Determination-Seeking Groups (Grey)	Avoiding generalizations when addressing concerns from equity-seeking and self-determination-seeking groups
Amplifying Voices from Equity-Seeking and Self-Determination-Seeking Groups (Grey)	Acknowledging issues exist and sharing progress in a transparent manner validates the concerns of equity-seeking and self-determination-seeking groups*
Amplifying Voices from Equity-Seeking and	Directly seeking input from individuals of groups at risk of bullying, such as by partnering with existing organizations who

Self-Determination-Seeking Groups (Grey)	are knowledgeable about the identities of the groups
Amplifying Voices from Equity-Seeking and Self-Determination-Seeking Groups (Grey)	Meaningful symbols to demonstrate to individuals from equity-seeking and self-determination-seeking that they are welcome in the oversight structure

Group Composition

Theme	Consideration
Potential Stakeholders (Academic), Potential Stakeholders (Grey)	Potential members include: students (including victims), parents or caregivers, grandparents, siblings, neighbours, administrators, teachers and special education teachers, non-teaching staff (e.g., counselors or mental health professionals, nurses, bus drivers, coaches, cafeteria workers, playground monitors, school resource officers), nongovernmental organizations, policy makers, healthcare providers, influentials, community leaders, religious leaders, and volunteers
Potential Stakeholders (Academic), External Reviewer (Grey)	If there is the opportunity to include individuals who are not part of the direct community (e.g., policymakers, academics), members could have a role in approving said members*
External Reviewer (Grey), Handling of Public Incidents by Other School Boards (Grey)	Involving an external party (e.g., experts on the issue such as academics and researchers, experts on organizational structure, Ministry of Ontario) is a way to increase accountability

Measurement Systems

Theme	Consideration
Measurement Systems (Academic)	Assess effectiveness of interventions with acceptability of implementation, sustainability, financial costs and benefits, and implementation fidelity
Measurement Systems (Academic), Measurement Systems (Grey)	A degree of consistency in measurement systems used to evaluate effectiveness of interventions (e.g., definitions of terms); while also accounting for situations where expansive tools may not be able to capture intricacies of all affected groups

Measurement Systems (Academic)	Measurement systems could be stratified by group to reveal trends
Measurement Systems (Academic)	Usage of qualitative and quantitative measurement systems
Measurement Systems (Academic)	Types of measurement systems that may be presented to the oversight structure include: scales, surveys, questionnaires, reports, field observation, focus groups, interviews, audiovisual recordings, and audits. More than one may be used to account for deficiencies in another (e.g., from biases)
Measurement Systems (Academic)	To ensure more comprehensive interpretation of results, measurement systems could be applied and/or reviewed by multiple stakeholders (e.g., students, teachers, parents, school administrators, and staff)
Measurement Systems (Academic), Measurement Systems (Grey)	Tools considering frequency of measurement (e.g., annually, pre- and post-intervention, predefined time points), as well as severity
Measurement Systems (Grey)	Monitoring of the measurement systems themselves to ensure they are doing the job they are supposed to
Measurement Systems (Grey)	Measurement systems to assess intervention efficacy could assess for other factors besides bullying to deliver a more holistic view

Training

Theme	Consideration
Training (Academic)	Continuity in training programs (e.g., annually, training renewal, check-ins)
Training (Academic)	Assessment in training programs (e.g., attendance, progress logs, checklists)
Training (Academic)	Delivery of training programs (e.g., in-person, remote)

Monitoring of Oversight Structure

Theme	Consideration
Assessing Effectiveness of the Oversight Structure	Review at the end of each school cycle to assess the oversight structure’s effectiveness in both its conduct and in achieving its

(Academic)	goals
Assessing Effectiveness of the Oversight Structure (Academic)	Methods to review the oversight structure may include qualitative and quantitative measures (e.g., reflections, questionnaires)

Anticipated Challenges in the Oversight Structure

Theme	Consideration
Organizational Considerations (Academic), Community Oversight in the Context of Hamilton (Grey)	Anticipating that the topic being addressed (bullying) is a personal and sensitive subject, and may cause members to feel strongly
Partnership with Community (Academic)	Addressing barriers to community members’ participation (e.g., transportation, childcare)
Challenges and Facilitators of Implementation (Academic), Accountability from School Board to Public (Grey)	Consideration of challenges to implementation, which can include scheduling constraints and conflicts, staff turnover, fatigue, burnout, unanticipated events, and administrative changes*
Accountability from School Board to Public (Grey)	Addressing distrust the public has for the school board (e.g., by demonstrating responsibility and accountability, such as through public statements or disclosures about progress being made)
Culture and Policies Around Reporting Bullying and Other Incidents in a School Setting (Grey)	Addressing the culture of fear preventing communication between members*
Culture and Policies Around Reporting Bullying and Other Incidents in a School Setting (Grey)	Whistleblower policy may partly aid in addressing culture of fear at a school-board level*
Addressing Multiple Perspectives and Transparent Communication (Grey)	Anticipating that differences in opinions may arise with various stakeholders’ perspectives*

3.4 Collective impact

Upon recommendation by the other members of the Recommendation 10.3 Team, collective impact (CI) was identified as a model of interest for the oversight structure. CI first appeared in an article by Kania and Kramer in 2011 as a framework for actors to join in addressing a social problem.¹²⁴ According to Kania et al., a revised definition of CI is of “a network of community members, organizations, and institutions that advance equity by learning together, aligning, and integrating their actions to achieve population and systems-level change.”¹²⁵ In brief, CI is guided by the following tenets:

1. Common agenda
2. Shared measurement
3. Mutually reinforcing activities
4. Continuous communication
5. “Backbone” team.¹²⁵

Evidently, certain considerations from section 3.3 in this report overlap with the principles of CI.

Examples of CI initiatives can be found throughout Canada, including those by REACH Edmonton, the DiverseCity Project, and the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR).¹²⁶

In the CI vocabulary, field catalysts are intermediaries that bring together actors from various areas who aim to address a common societal challenge. They also build the capacity of CI initiatives.¹²⁷ Field catalysts aid in making such initiatives more “visible, coherent, and robust” and also in moving initiatives to the level of systems change.¹²⁷

The Canadian-based Tamarack Institute is one such example of a field catalyst.¹²⁷ An example of their work can be traced back to their roots. Back when there was no community plan to address poverty in 2001, Tamarack had just begun the Communities Ending Poverty (CEP) network, where they played a part in connecting local changemakers to a national approach to reduce poverty.¹²⁷ Today, CEP has contributed to reducing poverty for over a million Canadians.¹²⁷ In fact, HRPR was among the first members of the CEP, with a focus on a living wage strategy. Tamarack played a role in HRPR's strategy by connecting six cities together to facilitate dialogue, conducting research into other jurisdictions' usage of the living wage strategy, and disseminating findings to partners and beyond.¹²⁷ As the needs of the community evolved, so did Tamarack as it took on additional roles.

CI may appear to be an appealing model to follow for the oversight structure, but a key consideration in pursuing CI is that the framework is centered around reciprocity between actors. Accordingly, this means that HWDSB must be committed to share in equitable partnership with other stakeholders in order for CI to be effectively embodied. Another major consideration is the resources required to properly implement CI. These resources may be considered in the form of time, funding, as well as the existence of a committed backbone team to support the CI structure.

3.5 Limitations

An inherent limitation of a scoping review is that it is broad in nature, limiting the ability to make specific conclusions. The broad nature of the review also made it difficult to include information from before 2018; a more expansive search would allow for more information to be recovered. Information recovery was further limited by inaccessibility of the articles, as well as the fact that not all relevant information may be published or documented in some form.

Within the topic of bullying oversight structures, terminology is variable. Inconsistent vocabulary required Dulai and Khairi to manually search through many irrelevant searches, which presented time that could have been used toward expanding the search criteria related to time feasibility. Moreover, inconsistent vocabulary within the field suggests that there may have been other terms used to refer to oversight structures that were not accounted for in the search strategy.

Given that the pandemic was declared in March of 2020, research into the longer term effects of COVID-19 on bullying is evolving.¹²⁸ While the primary authors' search did not reveal overwhelming evidence related to the effects of COVID-19, informed speculation into how the pandemic could impact the bullying landscape should be accounted for in the development of a bullying oversight structure. Over the course of the pandemic, usage of technology has increased, as youth and teens rely on this virtual landscape for school, extracurricular involvement, and social interaction.³⁷ As a result, cyberbullying is of greater concern. However, it is important to note that the degree of bullying (i.e., severity, duration) has more impact on the outcome than does the type of bullying.¹²⁹ That is, students who are bullied online are still likely to be bullied in-person, and students who bully online are also still likely to bully in-person.¹³⁰ In this lens, cyberbullying can be viewed as an extension or facet of face-to-face bullying, rather than a separate issue.

4. Future Directions

Other jurisdictions in Ontario were scanned for anti-bullying and safe schools initiatives through the Nexis Uni database, but not through a general scan of the school boards' websites. Thus, a future direction may be to more widely search other jurisdictions' handling of anti-bullying initiatives, with a particular focus on oversight structures, using databases such as Google. Additionally, those jurisdictions could include school boards beyond Ontario.

If CI presents a promising avenue, further work must be conducted into the model as a feasible and effective framework for the oversight structure. Canadian CI initiatives focused on education, such as Our Kids Network from Halton and Growing Up Great from Ottawa, may be researched into their success, as well as international ones, such as Strive, a nonprofit which successfully improved education outcomes in K-12.¹²² Tamarack as a field catalyst of interest may also be investigated.

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