



SafeHarbor Project Delegation at TDSB / Oct 1, 2024

Written delegation

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My name is Patricia Quan (she/her), the Principal Investigator of the [SafeHarbor Project](https://safeharborproject.org) funded by Laidlaw Foundation. I am also a former international student in the GTA, and now a Registered Social Worker in Ontario. I, alongside Dr. Kedi Zhao, who you will hear in-person, and other impacted students, conducted this youth-led community research initiative, in collaboration with Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto. This research focuses on examining the experiences of K-12 international students in poorly regulated homestay accommodations in the GTA. Through extensive community-based participatory research, we have identified systemic challenges these students face, which include significant instances of cultural misunderstanding, racism, and xenophobia within their homestay environments. Today, we wish to bring findings in [our report](#) to your attention and to highlight how these systemic issues affect international students' well-being and academic success at TDSB.

Lack of regulation and the systemic risks to international students' wellbeing

As the largest and leading school board in Canada, TDSB has a long-standing history of welcoming international students, the majority of whom come from Asian countries and are encouraged, by TDSB, to live in homestay accommodations. Despite the growing reliance on homestay accommodations for these students, this sector remains largely unregulated. Our report pointed out that these secondary international students are vulnerable to neglect, malnutrition, cultural isolation, and in many cases, blatant racism and discrimination in the homestays.

We urge TDSB to recognize that these are not isolated incidents, but rather systemic failures of a poorly regulated homestay system and lack of support for international students. When students struggle in their homestay environments, it directly impacts their mental and physical health, and in turn, their academic performance and overall experience within the TDSB system. As a school board responsible for the education and welfare of these students, it is important that TDSB take a proactive role in addressing following systemic gaps:

1. **Lack of regulation and unclear responsibilities:** The current "guides" and "best practices" in the homestay sector fail to clearly define the responsibilities of homestay providers, agents, custodians, and school support staff. This leaves students confused and allows others to shift responsibility, making it difficult for student issues to be properly addressed. (Also read this [CBC report](#))
2. **Inadequate training and resources:** Homestay providers and school staff often lack the proper training to understand the unique needs of secondary international students. Even when they want to help, they face a shortage of training opportunities and resources, as many community services are inaccessible to these students due to their legal status, leaving staff without effective options for support or referrals.



3. **No clear incident reporting mechanisms:** Students lack safe, clear channels to report issues in their homestays, leading to unreported maltreatments. Even when students are proactive and courageous enough to raise concerns, staff often don't know how to respond effectively (as mentioned in the previous point).
4. **“Go home” as the default solution:** When challenges arise – often due to the unreported issues – [our report](#) found that a common response from the schools is to send the students back to their home countries, reflecting Xenophobic and anti-Asian racist sentiments.

A call for action

I would like to specifically highlight two calls raised by participants in our research, including impacted students, public education sector workers, and support staff who work directly with secondary international students in the GTA.

1. **Implement stronger regulation** of the homestay sector, ensuring that homestay providers, agents, and custodians are held accountable for the safety and well-being of the students they host.
2. **Develop stronger, dedicated support systems for international students** by providing safe spaces to report issues and access mental health services. Ensure staff and homestay providers receive targeted training and resources tailored to the unique needs of this population, rather than grouping them with Asian domestic students.

With the significant number of Asian international students at TDSB, I strongly urge the Board of Trustees to consider creating better regulation and support for international students' well-being and increasing TDSB's capacities in addressing anti-Asian racism and discrimination happening both in school and in homestays. We are hoping that this can be the first step to understand and dismantle the challenges experienced by secondary international students living in homestay accommodations and to support our students, parents, and staff at TDSB.

Sincerely and in solidarity,

Patricia Quan, MSW, RSW
Principal Investigator, SafeHarbor Project

Read our community report: [In Search of a Safe Harbor: An Exploration of the Experiences of K-12 International Students in Unregulated Homestays](#) documenting the experience and systemic neglect of K-12 international students living in homestay accommodations