

## *Diversity of Thought: Exploring and Growing Creativity and Innovation*

### **About the project ...**

The purpose of the *Diversity of Thought: Exploring and Growing Creativity and Innovation* project was to expand employee and student perceptions of diversity and to deepen their understanding of the impact that their perceptions have on innovation, creativity and problem-solving in workplace and educational settings. A literature review was conducted to gain insight into possible approaches to begin this inquiry process and the decision was made to host a series of focus groups for staff and students. The topics of the focus group discussions included anti-discrimination education, perspective-taking, analysis of bias and open-minded listening, with the overarching purpose in all sessions to develop and deepen the participants' understanding of their own perceptions of diversity.

### **Impact on student learning and school culture ...**

- Involving student groups, including students with special education needs, provided opportunities to build relationships among the students and board staff along with leadership opportunities for all participants.
- The focus group discussions helped to identify barriers to innovative practices in areas such as co-curricular programming and the routines of classrooms, schools and the board.
- An exciting outcome of this project was the creation of a course about innovation and risk-taking for staff participating in leadership development opportunities.

### **Lessons learned for moving forward ...**

- It was evident from the focus group discussions that staff had difficulty incorporating creativity in their approaches to specific, problem-based issues. However, when staff were asked to discuss creativity in general they could openly analyze situations to identify when creativity and practicality can be balanced.
- Participation in professional development opportunities about creativity and innovation strengthened the overall skills of staff in discussing their needs, optimal conditions for creativity and barriers to innovation. In addition, staff identified the importance of leaders who encourage creativity and model professional practices that support cultures of creativity, innovation and reasoned risk-taking.