



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Submission to the OHRC's Anti-Black Racism in Education Consultation

September 2023





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Leading Education's Advocates

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Vision

The Black Trustees' Caucus (BTC) has a vision for ALL Ontario students, including Black students, to be part of a publicly funded education system that prepares them intellectually and mentally to critically face the challenges and opportunities presented as they become full contributing citizens of a global society. Students need to be prepared for a future that is not limited to the confines of their immediate surroundings, but one that encompasses a global community unhindered by the colonial legacies embedded in various aspects of current and historical North American society. Black students should be educated in identity-affirming and inspiring learning environments where they feel a strong and positive sense of belonging as well as a clear sense of their individual strengths, so they may realize their full potential in any chosen post-secondary pathway. Black students are a permanent part of the Ontario education system, and their achievement and well-being are in the forefront of the minds of the BTC. This paper outlines the BTC's vision for their success.

Background

In July 2023, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) made a call for submissions to Develop an Action Plan to Tackle Anti-Black Racism in Education. "All students have the right to an education free from discrimination, harassment, racism, and hate. Notwithstanding, Black students, administrators and educators are facing a crisis in Ontario's education system. Anti-Black racism remains deeply entrenched within Canadian institutions. Spanning several decades, many efforts have been made to address and combat anti-Black racism in education." (OHRC, 2023 [Tackling anti-Black racism in education](#))

Recognizing the urgent need for change in the education system, the OHRC convened roundtable discussions in April 2023 with students and duty-holders. The subsequent [What We Heard Report: Anti-Black Racism in Education Roundtables](#) summarized the key points and insights learned and forms the basis of a much broader and ongoing project to develop a comprehensive Action Plan with recommendations for all members of the education sector.

We thank the OHRC for calling on Ontarians to offer submissions and for its desire to add the BTC voice for consideration in the creation of an Action Plan to Tackle Anti-Black Racism in Education. This paper shares the BTC's aspirations and suggestions in relation to the ongoing work of the OHRC and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA). The one thing this report will **not** do is outline the well-documented sources of data and reports that outline the existence of anti-Black racism in Ontario schools as well as the impact, effects, and negative outcomes it has had on Ontario students, families and educators. Those reports can be accessed through referencing the OHRC's [Anti-Black Racism in Education: Compendium of Recommendations](#) as well as the work of other researchers in this area. A resource list is included at the end of this paper.



The Ontario Public School Boards' Association represents English public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve more than 1.3 million public elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA is seen as the expert voice of public education in Ontario and is routinely called on by the provincial government for input and advice on legislation and the impact of government policy directions.

The BTC was formed in 2022. It brings together publicly elected Black and Black-identifying trustees in a safe and supportive environment under the umbrella of OPSBA, so they may collaborate to influence change.

While centring discussions and recommendations on students who are Black and Black identifying, the BTC aims to support the needs of ALL children within the public education system. The Caucus believes that employing critical approaches for students who are Black and Black identifying will lead to universal positive outcomes for all students. The BTC forms a collective voice and creates opportunities to share and mobilize knowledge at public school boards in Ontario. The BTC also aims to address systemic barriers and disparities faced by Black and Black-identifying students and communities, knowing it leads to better learning and working environments for everyone.

The BTC mandate includes, but is not limited to, ensuring that appropriate connections are made to systemic racism and anti-Black racism as well as leading discussions on anti-Black racism and other issues that affect Black students.

Setting the Context

The term "Black" is used throughout the rest of this paper to refer to all people of African ancestry residing in Canada, regardless of whether they were born in Canada or have arrived in

Canada directly from their ancestral homelands on the continent of Africa, from various Caribbean communities or from other parts of the world. The term includes all people of African descent residing in Canada, regardless of their citizenship status or intersectional identity, including all Black-identifying individuals. The Black community in Ontario goes back over 250 years and is extremely diverse so we acknowledge the lack of consensus about terminology among the diverse Black communities in Ontario and across the country.

Canada's Black population continues to increase. According to Statistics Canada's 2021 Census, more than 1.5 million Canadians reported being Black or of African descent, representing 4.3% of the country's total population and 16.1% of the total racialized population. The majority of Black Canadians live in Ontario (49.7%) and children under 15 years old represent 26% of the Black population. Statistics Canada projections estimate that the Black Canadian population could double in size from 1.5 million in 2021 to over 3.0 million in 2041. ([Statistics Canada: Canada's national statistical agency \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/92-629-x/2021001/article/00001-eng.htm)) Black Canadians and people of African descent are throughout the entire Ontario education system.

The term anti-Black racism will be used throughout this paper; therefore, it is important to define its use. Anti-Black racism is not a new issue in Canada and has occurred in the education system for more than 160 years. This includes the establishment of segregated schools for Black students. ([Aladejebi, 2021](#)) The term was first defined by Dr. Akua Benjamin, a professor in the Social Work Department at Toronto Metropolitan University, who sought to highlight the effects of systemic racism on Black Canadians. ([Benjamin, 2003](#))

Ontario's Anti-Racism Directorate defines anti-Black racism as prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping, and discrimination directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement and its legacy. Anti-Black racism is deeply embedded in Canadian institutions, policies, and practices such that it is normalized or deemed invisible to the larger White society. Anti-Black racism is present in social, economic, educational, and political structures and organizations and it leads to unequal opportunities, lower socio-economic status, higher unemployment, underemployment, significant poverty rates, and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. ([Anti-Racism Directorate | ontario.ca](#), 2017)

Anti-Black racism is a universal occurrence. The UN General Assembly proclaimed 2015-2024 as the International Decade for People of African Descent ([Resolution 68/237](#)) citing the need to strengthen national, regional, and international cooperation in relation to the full enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights by people of African descent, and their full and equal participation in all aspects of society.

As proclaimed by the General Assembly, the theme for the International Decade is "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development." (United Nations, 2015)

The main objectives of the International Decade are:

- Promote respect, protection and fulfilment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by people of African Descent, as recognized in the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#);
- Promote a greater knowledge of and respect for the diverse heritage, culture and contribution of people of African descent to the development of societies;

- Adopt and strengthen national, regional and international legal frameworks according to the [Durban Declaration and Programme of Action](#) and the [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#) and to ensure their full and effective implementation. ([International Decade for People of African Descent | United Nations](#))

There have been at least 83 reports written in Ontario addressing anti-Black racism spanning over seven decades (1948-2023). More than 190 recommendations have been identified. ([OHRC, 2023](#))

The June 1992 [Stephen Lewis Report on Race Relations in Ontario](#) addressed racism in education and the same questions asked then are still being asked now, over 30 years later:

“Where are the courses in Black history?”

Where are the visible minority teachers?”

Why are there so few role models?”

Why do our white guidance counsellors know so little of different cultural backgrounds?”

Why are racist incidents and epithets tolerated?”

Why are there double standards of discipline?”

Why are minority students streamed?”

Why do they discourage us from university?”

These and similar questions have been documented, researched and asked for decades. Much work has been done to create the tools necessary to address these queries, but continued dialogue, partnerships and emphasis on deep learning is required. Prioritizing funds and specifically outlining what success could look like is crucial, as well as using accountability frameworks that are monitored and evaluated.

Priority Areas to Support Vision

In July 2020, Minister of Education [Stephen Lecce stated](#): "Every student — irrespective of the colour of their skin, faith, heritage, and orientation — deserves every opportunity to succeed in the classroom."

An equitable, inclusive education system is fundamental to achieving education’s core priorities and is recognized internationally as critical to delivering a high-quality education for all learners. *“Equity and excellence go hand in hand. ... In a truly equitable system, factors such as race, gender, and socio-economic status do not prevent students from achieving ambitious outcomes. Our experience shows that barriers can be removed when all education partners create the conditions needed for success.”* ([PPM 119, 2013](#))

Ontario’s education stakeholders must know what anti-Black racism looks like so they are able to address it within the system and be aware of the circumstances in which it may factor into the approaches they take and decisions made. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to achieving movement or results and so this paper highlights a few approaches/positions that have been

demonstrated in Ontario school boards that have achieved successful outcomes for some Black students as well as some suggestions for addressing current circumstances.

To lead in today's classrooms, it is vital for public school stakeholders to:

- Identify and address institutional practices that further marginalize and oppress students in unequal ways. To do this, a continued focus on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion through learning and practice is required. Education and awareness around the different forms of anti-Black racism is necessary. Education for all staff, especially frontline staff, as well as trustees, is required.
- Understand how anti-Black racism currently presents itself within the education system. It is not a new issue in Canada and has occurred in the education system for more than 160 years and includes the establishment of segregated schools for Black students. See: [Professional Advisory on Anti-Black Racism](#)
- Stay informed by using strategies for strengthening equity based on evidence of what works. This evidence is not limited to quantitative data but also comes from the voices of their local communities who are the experts in their own experiences.
- Not confuse equity with universal validation. Anti-Black racism is embedded in various Canadian institutions and policies and practices such that it is normalized or deemed invisible to the wider society. Educators and elected officials cannot validate oppressive beliefs, nor can they tell people with lived experience what they should think. The Black community is not a monolithic piece of society. Communication with local communities is essential.
- Understand the “sociopolitical context” of education within the larger context of societal and global inequity and its impact on the students and families within their school communities. There is often an erroneous focus on socioeconomic status as the flawed reason for a lack of performance and school success. Poverty and class are intersectional. Class is an intersectional identity and poverty is an intersectional condition informed by other identities and conditions. One cannot understand how class inequities operate without understanding how inequities related to race, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, immigrant status, (dis)ability, and other identities operate. Further education in this area is required.
- Resist simple solutions to complex problems. While simple solutions are enticing and sometimes popular, they distract from facing the in-depth work necessary for all students to achieve their full potential. All students are required to learn how to think critically and



participate in a complex global society. Educators know creating equitable classrooms and schools requires multiple layers of strategies and initiatives. Simple instructional strategies represent only one of those layers. Engaging Black students, educators, and community in creating complex solutions is required.

- Prioritize equity. Ontario students do not all occupy similar spaces in society nor attend classrooms with the same lived experiences. The [Ontario College of Teachers \(OCT\) Ethical Standards](#) explicitly addresses the commitments and ethical responsibilities of educators: Care, respect, trust and integrity are inter-related principles that should guide the collective and individual consciousness, decision making, knowledge building and action of educators within the system. Educators occupy space as influencers and have a duty to pay particular attention to the needs of all students placed in front of them. Unwavering commitment and staying on course are required.

[Ontario's Anti-Black Racism Strategy](#) states:

“The impact and consequences of our history have created systemic barriers that prevent people from fully participating in all parts of society. This is especially true for Black Ontarians of all backgrounds. Whether they’re recent immigrants or descendants of people who were enslaved, Black Ontarians live a shared present-day experience of anti-Black racism.

The stigma and stereotypes Black Ontarians and communities face have impacted public policies, decision-making and services. As a result, in nearly every measure of opportunity, security and fairness in our society, anti-Black racism is felt.”

The BTC strongly reaffirms that continued Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, anti-oppression, and anti-Black racism training is essential to create the conditions needed to create robust learning environments. The Caucus encourages stakeholders to continue to build system capacity and competency that can lead long-term change across all our systems. System change takes time, will, and skill and we encourage our education system to stay on course. To achieve the goals outlined within our provincial education act, there must be robust vigorous accountability measures and mechanisms put into place that ensure we are working toward common goals and marking the milestones along the way. It is possible to cultivate the knowledge and skills that enable all stakeholders to address the existence of anti-Black racism, oppressions, and inequities in our spheres of influence.

The Four Focus Areas

Black Student Achievement and Well-Being, Excellence and Joy

There are countless examples of Black student joy, success, excellence, and achievement within Ontario schools. There is also a myriad of examples where talent, skill, and potential has gone unfulfilled because of underutilized resources. Low expectations, a constant lack of recognition of potential or identity affirmation compounded by the lack of resolve to employ authentic equity measures to achieve the best results has been a documented pattern. Over the

past seven decades, under the direction of various political parties as well as public and private entities, evidence has been collected, reviewed, re-collected, re-reviewed, resulting in written formal reports. Comparable conclusions about what stakeholders within the education system need to do to support Black student achievement have been made. Surveys, focus groups, research and repeated analysis of collected data have been clear in their repeated recommendations.

More than cultural competence or awareness is needed to affirm the overt and subtle ways in which access and opportunity are distributed unfairly across race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, language, and other factors. Strong governance – that includes data collection, monitoring, and evaluation – is fundamental in ensuring that there is a redistribution of access and opportunity. Working with board staff, this might include the redistribution of anything from access to special classes with high academic expectations, creation of affinity spaces or access to specialized mental health supports to validating school cultures focused on identity affirmation. Stakeholders' commitment to more intensive institutional change requires multiple layers of strategies and initiatives. The issues are complex and require complex solutions, anchored in research, as well as the experiences of those impacted.

Boards of trustees govern every school board in Ontario. They play a key leadership role in ensuring that schools operate within the standards established by the province, and that programs and services remain responsive to the diverse communities they serve. Trustees have a legislated responsibility to address the achievement and well-being of all the students in Ontario. ([Good Governance, OESC 2022](#))

The *Education Act* states that a strong public education system is the foundation of a prosperous, caring and civil society. Trustees are the elected officials bound by this act to achieve this aspiration. Section 169.1 of the Act outlines, among other duties, that boards must promote student achievement and well-being; promote a positive school climate that is inclusive and accepting of all pupils, including pupils of any race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status or disability; deliver effective and appropriate education programs to its pupils; develop and maintain policies and organizational structures that, promote the goals, and monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies developed by the board in achieving the



board's goals and the efficiency of the implementation of those policies. ([Ontario Education Act 169.1](#))

There are several examples below where public school board trustees, directors of education, the Ministry of Education and School Mental Health Ontario have put policies and practices in place that focused on creating opportunities to explicitly concentrate on the achievement of Black students as well as promote Black excellence. The Black student journey can be demonstrated through the various initiatives that focus on Afrocentric curriculum, assessment practices, access to programs, human resource initiatives, and proactive practices that a variety of Ontario school boards have adopted. The BTC recommends that these strategies be shared and highlighted provincially so that boards can benefit from the leading practices that focus on Black student achievement, well-being, excellence, and joy.

Toronto DSB

*“The Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement is the first of its kind in public education in Canada. The Centre of Excellence is dedicated to improving the experiences and outcomes for Black students and aims to be responsive to the voices of Black communities who continue to advocate for systemic change within educational institutions and for dismantling anti-Black racism at the **TDSB**. . . . Programs, initiatives and opportunities are focused on honouring Black students’ experiences and strengths and ensuring their needs are met.”*

(Toronto DSB [Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement](#))

Durham DSB

*“The purpose of the Compendium of Action for Black Student Success is to use the recommendations from the Community Voice Forums, as well as the collected data and suggested recommendations from Toward Race Equity in Education Report (April 2017) to be specific and intentional in a plan for the success of Black/African Caribbean students in the **DDSB**. In alignment with the Equity and Diversity Strategic Framework, the Compendium of Action for Black Student Success lays out a specific plan to remove barriers, reduce frustration for families and ultimately improve the success of Black/African Caribbean students in our system.”* (Durham DSB [Black Students Compendium](#))

Peel DSB

*“All members of **PDSB** school communities are responsible for understanding and dismantling anti-Black racism. No one involved in the education system should be a bystander to anti-Black racism. Cross-racial allyship will be developed to ensure educators from all backgrounds are equipped with the competence, confidence, and courage to engage in this work. All members of the PDSB school community will be held accountable to develop their critical consciousness and to leverage their social location and positionality to foster anti-racist change. . . . The Black Student Success Strategy provides guidelines and actions to eliminate anti-Black racism from its operations, resources, staffing and leadership. There are six focus areas for this strategy:*

- 1. Develop the knowledge and skills of trustees and senior leaders to lead the implementation of this strategy*
- 2. Integrate the experiences of Black Canadians into the curriculum*
- 3. Foster anti-racist learning and working environments*
- 4. Continue engagement with Black communities*
- 5. Inspire and support Black student success*

6. *Hire and support more Black staff*” (Peel DSB [We Rise Together 2.0: Black Student Success Strategy](#))

York Region DSB

“The Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy: Creating anti-racist and Black-affirming learning and working environments was co-developed by York Region Black community leaders, YRDSB staff and in consultation with students. The launch of the strategy marks a coordinated effort to address anti-Black racism at the Board.

The systemic nature of anti-Black racism requires that school boards act proactively to support equitable access to quality education and opportunities for all students, and to challenge the marginalization of Black students, staff and families.” (York Region DSB [Centre for Black Student Excellence](#))

The BTC recommends that the Graduation Coach Program for Black Students be expanded provincially and should continue to be comprehensively promoted in all public school boards. The government should continue to invest heavily in this program.

“This multi-year funding provides intensive, culturally responsive support to Black students by hiring graduation coaches with lived experience and connections to Ontario’s diverse Black communities. These advisors work with school staff and school board leadership and offer direct supports and mentorship to Black students to support their well-being and academic



achievement. The program also helps to promote greater access to postsecondary opportunities so that when they graduate, students can get the specialized training they need to enter well-paid, skilled careers.”
(Ministry of Education)



Black students, as every student, have the right to be fully accepted within the Ontario education system, not just tolerated. They have the right to be fully supported as they strive to achieve in their learning environment. The BTC recommends that a co-ordinated approach be used to track Black student achievement. Graduation rates, EQAO scores and assessment reports are a few indicators of success. Black students should be thriving in their learning environments. The BTC affirms that connecting student well-being surveys to other areas of a co-ordinated approach to tackling anti-Black racism can help with an organizational approach.

A recent review of organizational practices to advance racial equity in children and youth mental health services (Lucente et al., 2021) identified some effective strategies to build trust and deliver more equitable, inclusive quality care. These strategies include workforce diversity approaches (hiring diverse staff that represent the communities the organization is serving); training and development (anti-racist and anti-oppressive training, training on culturally appropriate, and trauma-informed approaches to care); and inter-organizational and multi-sectoral partnerships and engagement with underserved, equity-deserving communities. ([Let's put our heads together 2022](#))

“The need for this fundamental change in school mental health has been with us a long time, but the crises of inequity and injustice that has dominated the past couple years have reinforced the urgency of taking this on directly and immediately. The path to identity-affirming school mental health begins with explicit individual and collective commitments to Reconciliation and equity and is rooted in anti-oppressive practice (AOP), cultural humility, and decentring whiteness while re-centring Black, Indigenous and marginalized perspectives.” (School Mental Health Ontario)

Enforcement and Accountability Mechanisms

If one thinks of anti-Black racism only as acts between individual people, it can be easy to distance oneself from it. It is essential that all stakeholders recognize and respond to anti-Black racism at its structural roots and not simply see it only as a transactional occurrence between individuals. It is embedded in systems and structures throughout education. Dialogue is an important part of creating change to address it. Subsequently, if the facts learned through dialogue are not acted upon, oppression is further perpetuated. Success requires our system to move beyond awareness. Trustees are tasked with the goals of improving student achievement and well-being, ensuring safe and inclusive learning environments, and building public trust. Accountability plays a significant role in building public trust. The BTC believes that school communities should be provided with regular updates on progress towards combatting anti-Black racism without having to request it. Co-ordinated monitoring and tracking systems should be implemented with frequent and regularly occurring updates scheduled by board and staff at the outset of each year.

Currently some boards or board departments carry out assessments, sometimes called “equity audits,” that involve collecting and analyzing information, usually through multiple data-gathering processes, to determine the extent to which a department, board policy or practice is equitable to staff and/or students. These assessments provide opportunities for deep examination of a variety of aspects of the institution, from curriculum and pedagogy to policy or overall climate, to uncover institutional strengths and areas for growth related to equity, diversity, and inclusion. This process would be of benefit to every publicly funded school and school board. Leading practices involve these assessments to be completed by a team with formal training in assessment and evaluation with expertise in equity and bias. Throughout the province each board has unique challenges and opportunities that exist in their specific context. Using varied methods for data collection, both qualitative and quantitative, allow for those trained to uncover strengths and areas for further focus. Employing various formal and informal interviews of students, staff, parents and caregivers as well as intersectional focus groups and policy analysis

Relevant Resources

[Black Students Compendium – Durham DSB](#)

[Learn.Disrupt.Rebuild.@HWDSB](#)

[Mental Health and Well-being | Hamilton-Wentworth DSB](#)

[CAFCAN | Caribbean African Canadian Social Services](#)

[Discriminatory & Harmful Language Protocol](#)

[Black Excellence - Ottawa-Carleton DSB](#)

[Equitable Recruitment Framework Booklet](#)

[Professional Advisory on Anti-Black Racism | Ontario College of Teachers](#)

[We Rise Together \(Peel DSB\)](#)

[We Rise Together 2.0: Black Student Success Strategy](#)

[Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement: Toronto DSB](#)

[Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy | York Region DSB](#)

[Black Brilliance series creates space for Black student voices - Waterloo Region DSB](#)

improves the possibility of developing a full picture of an institutions' opportunities and challenges. Dedicated funding is required to support staff in building expertise in equity auditing, demographic data collection, research, analysis and policy monitoring and evaluation to ensure anti-racism, decolonization system change planning, and equity policy goals that address anti-Black racism are implemented successfully.



The BTC recommends heavily subsidizing related AQ courses and making anti-Black racism training a pre-service requirement for OCT certification. Having anti-Black racism, anti-oppression training as part of principal and supervisory officer programs supports their competency building. The Ontario College of Teachers and Ministry of Education play a role in bolstering the skills needed to address anti-Black racism and decolonization within the Ontario education system. Institutions should be mandated to teach pre-service candidates about racism, oppression, discrimination, anti-Black racism and colonization before they head into classrooms to teach students. Appraisal processes for classroom educators, school leaders and directors of education are an opportunity to demonstrate evidence-based leadership in achieving strategic goals and highlighted outcomes.

Over the years the Ministry of Education, individual school boards and labour partners have implemented several changes to address the inequities that are demonstrated in student achievement and areas of discipline. There are various examples of work happening across the province. The BTC strongly recommends that further focus and enhancement of accountability mechanisms related to monitoring and tracking are required to ensure tools developed are being employed as designed and not weaponized against Black students and families. The disproportionate amount of Black youth in Ontario's child welfare system was examined and resulted in [One Vision One Voice: Changing the Ontario Child Welfare System to Better Serve African Canadians](#). Co-ordinated efforts to enact a province-wide approach to measuring the impacts of efforts made to address anti-Black racism are needed. These must build on individual organizational approaches so stakeholders can examine their role in upholding anti-Black racism. Future decisions and strategies must be evidence-based and informed by research that supports educational goals. More collaboration between boards, staff, labour organizations and the ministry is recommended. Ministry data can complement board data to inform decision-making and local education staff in developing systems to track achievement, equity, and well-being. Board staff should collect disaggregated race-based and intersectional data to use for reporting back to trustees to support their decision making.

Pathways for Parent, Caregiver and Community Involvement

As leaders in public education, trustees' work includes strategic planning, budget-setting, community engagement and assessing the director of education's performance. When it comes to parent, caregiver, family and community involvement, each public board or school authority will have a local context to consider. No matter the strategy used to engage parents and caregivers, it is encouraged that it be co-developed with the Black community, Black staff, and

the local school board to coordinate efforts when addressing anti-Black racism within the system. Once a strategy is developed by staff and approved by the board of trustees, financial and human resources devoted to its implementation is required as well as vigorous accountability measures to ensure that the strategy is implemented as planned. Creating partnerships and engaging with Black parents, caregivers, families, and community members is instrumental for the success of Black students. Community models are instrumental. Strong governance is required. Strong boards recognize that the consultation and engagement of diverse communities is vital for a range of voices and perspectives to be honored and valued in decision making and then work with their directors of education to actualize outcomes. Consultation and collaboration with families, staff, students, community members, and diverse stakeholders provide information that will support the strategic directions and policy approaches that board and staff take to support student achievement.

“The most important question school board trustees must ask themselves in guiding their work is, ‘What is the goal of high-quality, accessible and equitable public education?’ Good governance means asking that question, and others that flow from it, through a critical and explicit self-reflection on power, privilege and oppression. It means thinking about the unfair advantages, biases, barriers and impacts on equitable access, opportunities and outcomes that members of school communities experience. It is about who is included and who is excluded and why things are done the way they are. Trustees must ask questions about who is impacted positively or negatively by maintaining the status quo and how school boards are evaluating and measuring these impacts. Ultimately, how does a school board know if it is achieving the goal of ensuring quality public education for all? Good governance through an equity, diversity, and inclusion lens is not easy, but it is of the utmost importance.”
(Good Governance, OESC 2022)

Strong commitment could involve provincial bodies and stakeholders developing modules that share methods and inform of leading practices in community engagement. A provincial roundtable that is formed not only for accountability, but to disseminate information regarding leading practices is a possible step. The Caucus suggests that boards and staff are encouraged to work with local community groups to engage parents regarding board policies, practices, and school routines. The BTC advocates for the expansion of the School and Family Advocates program (SFA) provincially with added responsibility of engaging with Black parents and caregivers to support them in navigating the education system, engaging with schools, and advocating for their children.

BTC recommends that trustees, as elected officials, complete all OPSBA training modules to create common understanding of governance structures across the province. This training could be mandated for board chairs, vice chairs and chairs of all board committees. Modules should be created that inform and educate parents, caregivers and students about board policies and procedures as well as the process by which student discipline is handled. School boards should be mandated to inform parents and caregivers about the complaints and appeal mechanisms available to them should they feel there is an issue with school policies or if their children have

been unjustly suspended or expelled, and all the avenues that they may pursue. It is crucial that we move beyond the one-size-fits-all approach of current protocols to actively develop engagement and communication pathways that recognize the current barriers for parent involvement that often reinforce anti-Black racism. A creation of pathways for vigorous and thorough community outreach that recognizes concerns and offers remedies that identify and address systemic discrimination and barriers is recommended.



Communication in a manner that engages the community may vary from some current board practices.

Boards should be provided with dedicated Priorities and Partnership Funding to ensure after school recreational programs and services can be made available to Black communities as well as vulnerable student groups at no cost. This funding would enable all boards and third-party providers to offer services that promote achievement and well-being both inside and outside of the traditional school day. The former TDSB Priority School Initiative Funding should be restored and serve as a model for how the ministry can support all boards in offering enhanced community-based youth programming.

Boards should be provided with dedicated Priorities and Partnership Funding to ensure services can be made available to Black communities as well as vulnerable student groups. This funding would enable boards and third-party providers to offer services that promote achievement and well-being both inside and outside of the traditional school day.

There are examples of current school board and ministry initiatives that have dedicated time and resources to specifically engage diverse parent, caregiver and community groups. A central repository that allows for sharing of these leading practices would be of benefit.

Relevant Resources

[The Student and Family Advocate Program \(SFA\) | Your village is standing beside you.](#)

[Director's Panel Series on Bringing the Multi-Year Plan to Life – Halton DSB](#)

[Student Voices on the HDSB's Response to Racism](#)

[Equity Matters 2023 - Limestone DSB](#)

[Community Engagement – Toronto DSB](#)

[System Navigator: Anti-Black Racism Focus - Waterloo Region DSB](#)

[CRRP Calendar 2023-2024 – Near North DSB](#)

Relationships, Policy, and Advocacy

“School boards are responsible for student achievement and well-being, safe and inclusive school climates, ensuring effective stewardship of the board’s resources, and delivering effective and appropriate education programs for their students. Trustees represent the interests of the communities they serve in setting high standards of student achievement and well-being.

Through their local governance, school boards exercise their leadership to set policy and strategic direction, hire and appraise the performance of the director of education, approve allocation of resources, and engage with education partners, stakeholders and the broader public. This governance role is fundamental to setting the conditions for all students to become successful, productive and engaged citizens. Effective governance ensures that the education system remains accountable to the people of Ontario.” (Good Governance, OESC 2022)

The BTC recommends that all education stakeholders, and particularly all trustees, purposely address the institutional conditions that continue to support anti-Black racism. There have been various positive steps taken to institute initiatives and create programs that mitigate the effects of anti-Black racism but unless the underlying systemic causes are addressed there will not be systemic change that eradicates its existence in Ontario’s public education system. Realization will require ethical leadership, perseverance, and courage and the BTC recommends creating Black Student Trustee positions to assist with this objective.

The Caucus recommends that the provincial government create a Partnership Table consisting of Black student leaders, trustees, educators, the OHRC and community members. As

education stakeholders, local and provincial labour groups also have a role to play in supporting the eradication of anti-Black racism in the education system and should be at the table. This can be of benefit when addressing the disconnect that exists between policy and practices. This table would aim to engage the provincial government in discussions centred on the aforementioned issues and focus on the actions to help refine and realize our shared vision for Ontario's Black students.



Black history is Canada's history and BTC strongly recommends that Black students have a right to an Afrocentric curriculum that represents them, that includes Black experiences in all aspects of the curriculum and that it is interwoven throughout different aspects of the education system. This would include programs, board activities and student trustee positions. In February 2022, the Ministry of Education partnered with the African Canadian National Coalition against Hate, Oppression and Racism (ANCHOR) to provide classroom-ready resources and training aligned to the Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6, and History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8, curriculum. This was an excellent start.

Further curriculum development and accountable focus is warranted, and educators should be fully supported in changing practice and addressing oppressions related to power, access, and opportunity. Training for all education workers and teachers is critical. Full support requires committed funding for both professional and curriculum development. Decision making based on the principle of targeted universalism prioritizes the needs and rights of Black students within community resulting in addressing the needs of all.

Ontario's Anti-Racism Directorate launched the Anti-Black Racism Strategy to eliminate disparaging outcomes for Black Ontarians in various sectors by 2024, in alignment with the close of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent. Creating a dedicated course code for the Deconstructing Anti-Black Racism secondary school course is recommended as it is a step toward this goal. This allows for the course to change from an interdisciplinary course to one that is specific, with a dedicated code, increasing access and credit accumulation as a university pathway course for all the students who enrol in it. Ensuring that Ontario College of Teachers advisories are foundational and prioritized in teacher practice assists in addressing anti-Black racism. Subsidizing AQ courses that impact practice in this area would be of benefit to all educational stakeholders. Partnering with, funding, and promoting organizations that are offering course work concentrating on anti-Black racism is recommended. For example, in effort to combat systemic anti-Black racism in Ontario's youth sector, YouthREX, based at York University, launched an online certificate that provides education and training from experts across Ontario focusing on the well-being of Black youth (YouthREX,

2022). Steering educators to courses like this should become the norm for educational institutions.

Relevant Resources

[Centring Black, Indigenous and Marginalized Perspectives in Mental Health Promotion at School: Examining and Decentring whiteness - School Mental Health Ontario](#)

[Welcome to the DDSB: Parent/Guardian Resources](#)

[Anti-Black-Racism Policy – Hamilton-Wentworth DSB](#)

[Advisory Committees and Affinity Networks - Limestone DSB](#)

[We Rise Together 2.0: Black Student Success Strategy – Peel DSB](#)

[Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement - About Us](#)

[Staff, Student and Community Groups - Waterloo Region DSB](#)

[Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy – York Region DSB](#)

[Professional Advisories | Ontario College of Teachers \(oct.ca\)](#)

Conclusion

In 2020, OPSBA passed a motion to conduct an [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion \(EDI\) Audit](#) to determine the best approach to combatting systemic racism and oppressive practices introspectively. OPSBA aimed to determine best practices, strategies, and approaches to advocate and support an inclusive organization and to support public school boards with regard to Anti-Black and Anti-Indigenous Racism. Various recommendations came out of the report, including that a BTC be formed and for it to have a voice independent of OPSBA, develop and share policy papers and other tools and resources to support school boards to better address Black education and support Black students.

OPSBA recognizes that in a strong public education system, equity and excellence go hand in hand. This paper identifies some of the complex issues that face Ontario’s Black students, staff, and families and identifies viable ways to address some of the current inequities that exist. In their 2023 [Identity-Affirming School Mental Health Frame](#), School Mental Health Ontario notes that to “dismantle oppressive systems and rebuild just ones” it is important to understand the ways by which inequality is manifested and maintained. By explicitly centring Black and Indigenous students’ experiences of racism and oppression, we will “inevitably gain knowledge and understanding to inform our actions in support of other marginalized and oppressed identities such as racialized, 2SLGTBQIA+, newcomer and neurodiverse students, among others” thereby creating better futures for every student. All education stakeholders are tasked with working diligently to realize that vision. Continued support, dedicated funds, and clear accountability mechanisms are needed to achieve the BTC’s vision for Black students in Ontario.

Continued collaborative dialogue is required to identify and dismantle the colonial culture, practices, and structures that currently impact Black student achievement and well-being.

System action and change can be realized once full trust is established. Re-establishing relationship, organizational and societal trust is a priority for the BTC.

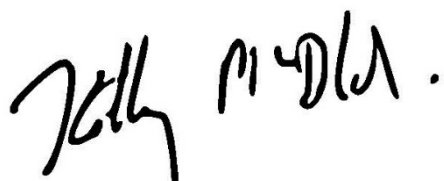
The BTC recommends:

- Establishing solid accountability frameworks that consistently revisit and report back on the plethora of tools that school boards, staff and the provincial government already have.
- Creating Black Student Trustee positions.
- The provincial government create a Tripartite Partnership Table with Black education stakeholders and the OHRC to work collaboratively to operationalize the vision outlined in this paper and to discuss what needs to be definitively established (frameworks, supports, curriculum, resources, and funding) to effectively achieve this vision.

The BTC would like to thank the OHRC for calling for submissions and accepting these suggestions for consideration when creating their Action Plan to Tackle Anti-Black Racism in Education.

The Black Trustees' Caucus comprises Trustees from the Avon Maitland, Durham, Greater Essex County, Hamilton-Wentworth, Limestone, Ottawa-Carleton, Peel, Thames Valley, Toronto, Waterloo Region, and York Region District School Boards.

Regards,



Kathy McDonald
Chair, OPSBA Black Trustees' Caucus

CC: Minister of Education Stephen Lecce
Kate Manson-Smith, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education
Dasha Androusenkov, Director of Stakeholder Relations, Minister of Education's Office

Our Association represents English public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve more than 1.3 million public elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA is seen as the expert voice of public education in Ontario and is routinely called on by the provincial government for input and advice on legislation and the impact of government policy directions.

Appendix: Resources and Sources

The following websites, courses and podcasts were consulted when providing background, context, definitions and recommendations for this paper:

Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre [Glossary — Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre \(aclrc.com\)](https://aclrc.com)

Calgary Anti-Racism Education [Calgary Anti-Racism Education — Alberta Civil Liberties Research Centre \(aclrc.com\)](https://aclrc.com)

Canadian Journal of Education [The Toronto connection: Poverty, perceived ability, and access to education equity | Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation \(sfu.ca\)](https://www.sfu.ca/cje/)

Canadian Race Relations Foundation [Research and Reports – Canadian Race Relations Foundation \(crrf-fcrr.ca\)](https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca)

Canadian Race Relations Foundation [Canadian Race Relations Foundation \(crrf-fcrr.ca\)](https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca)

Canadian Race Relations Foundation [Black Canadian National Survey – Interim Report 2021 – Canadian Race Relations Foundation \(crrf-fcrr.ca\)](https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca)

Carver-Thomas, D. (2018). Diversifying the teaching profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color. [Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color \(learningpolicyinstitute.org\)](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org)

City of Toronto – Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit (CABR) – [CABR Resources - Master List \(toronto.ca\)](https://toronto.ca)

CUPE [CUPE's Anti-Racism Strategy | Canadian Union of Public Employees](https://cupe.ca)

Durham District School Board [Black-Students-Compendium.pdf \(ddsbc.ca\)](https://www.ddsbc.ca)

Durham District School Board [Welcome to the DDSB: Parent/Guardian Resources](https://www.ddsbc.ca)

ETFO [Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario - Anti-Black Racism \(etfo.ca\)](https://etfo.ca)

ETFO Action on Anti-Black Racism [190226_ABRacismBrochure.pdf \(etfo.ca\)](https://etfo.ca)

Equity Literacy Institute [Home | Equity Literacy Institute](https://equityliteracyinstitute.ca)

Global Centre for Pluralism [Addressing-Anti-Black-Racism-in-Canadian-Schools-F-WEB.pdf \(pluralism.ca\)](https://www.pluralism.ca)

Government of Ontario [Ontario's Anti-Black Racism Strategy | ontario.ca](https://ontario.ca)

Government of Ontario Equity Action Plan [Ontario's education equity action plan | ontario.ca](https://ontario.ca)

Government of Ontario [Archived - Ontario's anti-racism strategic plan | ontario.ca](https://ontario.ca)

Government of Ontario [Building a Stronger and More Inclusive Ontario: Ontario's Anti-Racism Strategic Plan | ontario.ca](https://ontario.ca)

Government of Ontario [Anti-Racism Directorate | ontario.ca](https://ontario.ca)

Government of Ontario Ontario's Equity And Inclusive Education Strategy [ONTARIO'S EQUITY AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION STRATEGY](#)

Government of Ontario [Transferable skills \(gov.on.ca\)](#)

Halton District School Board [Director's Panel Series on Bringing the Multi-Year Plan to Life \(hdsb.ca\)](#)

Halton District School Board [Student Voices on the HDSB's Response to Racism FINAL](#)

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board [FINAL Anti-Black-Racism.pdf \(hwdsb.on.ca\)](#)

Henderson, A. T. & Mapp K. L. (2002). A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement. National Centre for Family and Community Connections with Schools, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. <https://sedl.org/connections/resources/evidence.pdf>

James, C.E. & Turner, T. (2017). Towards Race Equity In Education: The Schooling of Black students in the Greater Toronto Area. [Towards-Race-Equity-in-Education-April-2017.pdf \(yorku.ca\)](#)

KQED [Why The Teacher's Pet Resembles The Teacher | KQED](#)

Learning For justice Dillard, C. Black minds matter. [Teaching-Tolerance-Magazine-Issue-63-Fall-2019.pdf \(learningforjustice.org\)](#)

Limestone District School Board [Equity Matters 2023 - Limestone District School Board](#)

Miller, J. (2020, June 5). Why the Black struggle in Canada has all but been erased. Two historians explain our blind spot. Toronto Star. [Why the Black struggle in Canada has all but been erased. Two historians explain our blind spot \(thestar.com\)](#)

National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE - National Council of Teachers of English](#)

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies [One Vision One Voice: Changing the Ontario Child Welfare System to Better Serve African Canadians – Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies \(oacas.org\)](#)

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies [ABR in Ontario's systems - Anti-Black racism and child welfare - OACAS Library Guides at Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies \(libguides.com\)](#)

Ontario College of Teachers [Professional Advisories | Ontario College of Teachers \(oct.ca\)](#)

Ontario College of Teachers [Professional Advisory on Anti-Black Racism | Ontario College of Teachers \(oct.ca\)](#)

Ontario Education Act [Education Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2 \(ontario.ca\)](#)

Ontario's Equity and Inclusion Education Strategy [Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy, 2009 | ontario.ca](#)

Ontario Government Newsroom [Ontario Supporting Black Student Success | Ontario Newsroom](#)

Ontario Human Rights Commission [Anti-Black Racism in Education: Compendium of Recommendations | Ontario Human Rights Commission \(ohrc.on.ca\)](#)

Ontario Human Rights Commission [An intersectional approach to discrimination: Addressing multiple grounds in human rights claims | Ontario Human Rights Commission \(ohrc.on.ca\)](#)

Ontario Human Rights Commission [Tackling anti-Black racism in education | Ontario Human Rights Commission \(ohrc.on.ca\)](#)

Ontario Human Rights Commission [Ontario Human Rights Commission | \(ohrc.on.ca\)](#)

Ontario Human Rights Commission [Racial harassment and poisoned environments \(fact sheet\) | Ontario Human Rights Commission \(ohrc.on.ca\)](#)

Ontario Ministry of Education [Policy/Program Memorandum 119 | Education in Ontario: policy and program direction | ontario.ca](#)

Ontario Public School Board Association: Let's put our heads together 2022: Coordinating our efforts to improve mental health and well-being for Ontario's Children and Youth [CCYMHbookletEngSep-12.pdf \(opsba.org\)](#)

Ontario Public Schools' Board Association [Good Governance: A Guide for Trustees, School Boards, Directors of Education, and Communities \(opsba.org\)](#)

OPSBA Member Boards and School Authority websites [Members - OPSBA](#)

Ontario Student and Family Advocate Program [The Student and Family Advocate Program \(SFA\) | Your village is standing beside you.](#)

OSSTF [Strengthen Public Education — Rebuild Ontario \(osstf.on.ca\)](#)

Ottawa Carleton District School Board [Increasing Representation - Ottawa-Carleton District School Board \(ocdsb.ca\)](#)

Ottawa Carleton District School Board [Equitable Recruitment Framework Booklet \(1\).pdf \(sharpschool.com\)](#)

Pacific Standard, For Black students, stereotyping starts early. [For Black Students, Stereotyping Starts Early - Pacific Standard \(psmag.com\)](#)

Peel District School Board [Home - We Rise Together](#)

Peel District School Board [We Rise Together 2.0: Black Student Success Strategy - Peel Board Office Site \(peelschools.org\)](#)

People for Education: A statement from People for Education on anti-Black racism [A statement from People for Education on anti-Black racism - People for Education](#)

RAND Cooperation [Teachers Matter: Understanding Teachers' Impact on Student Achievement | RAND](#)

School Mental Health Ontario [Connect the dots to equity and achievement - School and system leaders - School Mental Health Ontario \(smho-smsso.ca\)](#)

School Mental Health Ontario [Find a resource - School Mental Health Ontario \(smho-smsso.ca\)](#)

School Mental Health Ontario [Identity-affirming school mental health: a frame for reflection and action - About School Mental Health Ontario - School Mental Health Ontario \(smho-smso.ca\)](#)

Springer Link [Barriers and Facilitators to Accessing Mental Healthcare in Canada for Black Youth: A Scoping Review | Adolescent Research Review \(springer.com\)](#)

Statistics Canada [Canada's Black population: Education, labour and resilience \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)

The Atlantic, What anti-racist teachers do differently [How to Be an Anti-racist Teacher - The Atlantic](#)

The Black Health Alliance [ANTI-BLACK RACISM \(blackhealthalliance.ca\)](#)

The Conversation [Black History: How racism in Ontario schools today is connected to a history of segregation \(theconversation.com\)](#)

The Royal Commission on Learning [For the love of learning : report of the Royal Commission on Learning \(queensu.ca\)](#)

The Walrus [Canadian Education Is Steeped in Anti-Black Racism | The Walrus](#)

Toronto District School Board [Centre of Excellence for Black Student Achievement \(tdsb.on.ca\)](#)

Toronto District School Board [Community Engagement \(tdsb.on.ca\)](#)

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https://www.turnerconsultinggroup.ca/uploads/2/9/5/6/29562979/report_1_-_needs_assessment_-_final_-_june_15.pdf.

UNESCO [Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education | UNESCO](#)

United Nations [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination | OHCHR](#)

United Nations [International Decade for People of African Descent | United Nations](#)

University of Guelph [Anti-Racism & Anti-Oppression Resources | Diversity and Human Rights \(DHR\) \(uoguelph.ca\)](#)

Waterloo Region District School Board [Black Brilliance series creates space for Black student voices - Waterloo Region District School Board \(Waterloo Region District School Board\) \(wrdsb.ca\)](#)

Waterloo Region District School Board [Staff, Student and Community Groups - Waterloo Region District School Board \(Waterloo Region District School Board\) \(wrdsb.ca\)](#)

Waterloo Region District School Board [System Navigator: Anti-Black Racism Focus - Waterloo Region District School Board \(Waterloo Region District School Board\) \(wrdsb.ca\)](#)

York Region District School Board [Centre for Black Student Excellence | York Region District School Board \(yrdsb.ca\)](#)

York Region District School Board Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy 2 [Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy | York Region District School Board \(yrdsb.ca\)](#)

YouthRex-York University [YouthREX-Collective-Actions-to-Advance-Equity-for-Black-Youth.pdf](#)

[Anti-Racism Tools - Trying Together](#)

[Intersectionality Matters! on Apple Podcasts](#)

[Principals Need Help Building Anti-Racist Schools \(edweek.org\)](#)

[What Anti-racism Really Means for Educators | Learning for Justice](#)

[Racism in schools – News, Research and Analysis – The Conversation – page 1](#)

[Black and White \(nationalgeographic.com\)](#)

[Deepening Your Understanding of Race and Racism | Tools for Anti-Racist Teaching | PBS LearningMedia](#)

[“Dear White Boss...” \(hbr.org\)](#)

[Whiteness | National Museum of African American History and Culture \(si.edu\)](#)

[What is 'anti-blackness' and how does it impact black people? | Metro News](#)

[Racial Equity Tools | Home](#)

[Looking to the past to understand systemic anti-Black racism | Strategic directions \(legalaid.on.ca\)](#)