



# Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy:

**Creating anti-racist and Black-affirming learning and working environments**

## **PART 1: BACKGROUND REPORT**

**March 8, 2021**





The AYA or fern is an African Adinkra symbol of endurance and resourcefulness.

It is used in the logo for YRDSB's Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy to symbolize the many adversities and difficulties the Black community has endured and the Board's commitment to working with the community over the longterm to overcome the obstacles to implementing this strategy.



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# PREAMBLE

Ontario's public education system has evolved within an historical context of white supremacy, colonialism, and anti-Black racism, all of which have been woven into the fabric of school board policies and practices, as well as individual attitudes toward Black students, families, and staff. This legacy has led to longstanding disproportionalities and disparities for Black children and communities. The success of Black students and staff within school boards, in spite of anti-Black racism, is a testament to the resilience of the communities and cultures of people of African descent.

Despite continued denials of the systemic nature of anti-Black racism and its characterization as a purely American phenomenon by many Canadians, anti-Black racism has a long and deeply rooted history in Canada and in Ontario's education system in particular. Anti-Black racism was evident in Canada during the hundreds of years that slavery was legal and enslaved African children were denied an education; when school districts denied admission to Black students; when Black people were erased from the teaching of Canadian history; and when the government of Upper Canada (now Ontario) enacted legislation that allowed for segregated schools, which remained legal until 1964.<sup>1</sup>

Anti-Black racism continues to be a defining feature of Ontario's education system, marring the schooling of Black students and the work experiences of Black staff. While Black children enter the education system excited and ready to learn, the opportunity gaps created by systemic and interpersonal anti-Black racism result in disparities and disproportionalities in educational attainment and harm to the mental health and self-esteem of Black children and youth, with long-lasting impacts. The persistence and impact of anti-Black racism in Ontario's education system speaks to the urgent need for the York Region District School Board (YRDSB, the Board) to prioritize the dismantling of anti-Black racism and the creation of Black-affirming learning and working environments.

The systemic and persistent nature of anti-Black racism requires that the YRDSB act proactively and boldly to achieve the goal of "education for all" and create schools free from racism and other forms of oppression. This requires that the Board challenge and change the mindsets of staff who see Black students as disruptive, threatening, and unable and unwilling to achieve academically. It also requires the closing of the opportunity gap that undermines equitable outcomes for Black students. While there are no easy solutions for issues that are institutional and endemic, this Steering Committee has focused on developing a strategy that will improve, if not transform, the schooling of Black students and the work experiences of Black staff.

1. Henry, N. (2019, May). Anti-Black racism in Ontario schools: A historical perspective. *Research & Policy Brief, Issue No. 1*. Retrieved from [https://www.turnerconsultinggroup.ca/uploads/2/9/5/6/29562979/policy\\_brief\\_-\\_no\\_1\\_may\\_2019.pdf](https://www.turnerconsultinggroup.ca/uploads/2/9/5/6/29562979/policy_brief_-_no_1_may_2019.pdf)

The Anti-Black Racism Steering Committee was formed in June 2019 with the goal of developing a strategy to dismantle anti-Black racism at the YRDSB. During this time, two factors have amplified the need for this strategy. First, the global pandemic has exposed the ways in which systemic racism leaves Black communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. The pandemic has also exposed the ways in which Black students have been marginalized by the education system and are falling further behind. In addition, the killing of George Floyd in the midst of the pandemic has renewed society's focus on the systemic nature of anti-Black racism within policing and other Canadian systems and institutions.

In York Region, many parents, students, community members, and community agencies have been voicing their concerns about how anti-Black racism continues to rob Black children, families, and communities of their futures. Black staff at the YRDSB have shared how damaging anti-Black racism has been to students, their own careers, and also to the mental health of both Black students and staff. They have joined the Anti-Black Racism Steering Committee to work with Board staff at this critical time in history to develop a strategy that will dismantle the attitudes and structures that maintain and recreate anti-Black racism within the Board. The goal is to dismantle a system that was not built for Black students in the first place and reimagine and rebuild what education should have been in the first place: anti-racist and Black-affirming learning and working environments in which Black students and staff can be their full selves, contribute their best, and continue to grow and thrive.

This strategy — which was co-developed by the Black community, Black staff, and the YRDSB — represents the beginning of coordinated efforts to address anti-Black racism at the Board. This committee recognizes, however, that the impact of the strategy will only be as great as the Board's implementation of the strategy, the financial and human resources devoted to its implementation, and the accountability measures put in place to ensure that the strategy is implemented as planned.

The Steering Committee envisions that this strategy will be a critical tool for systems change. We hope it will change not only Board policies and practices, but also the day-to-day experiences of Black students and staff. While understanding the priorities and actions of the strategy are important, we felt that it was equally important for Board staff to understand how and why these priorities and actions were identified. As such, we hope this report will serve as a learning tool that guides all Board staff in understanding anti-Black racism and encourages critical self-reflection. We also recognize that there are many educators and school administrators within the YRDSB who have not been fully able to engage in the anti-racist work they would like to be doing. We hope that this strategy emboldens them to engage in this work and to stand with Black staff as they seek to create anti-racist learning and working environments that are affirming of Black identities.



As members of the Steering Committee, we are grateful to the many students, parents, community members, and staff who demonstrated the courage and commitment to participate in the consultations for this strategy. We thank Tana Turner and Yvette Barnes for their work with the Steering Committee, for writing this report, and for developing a strategy that addresses our concerns and reflects our input. We also acknowledge our fellow Steering Committee members, who have shown tremendous commitment and leadership, and have given generously of their time and knowledge, to develop this strategy in the hope of bringing about transformational change to the experiences of Black students and staff at the YRDSB.

Some people may question the introduction of this strategy in the midst of a global pandemic. While this strategy has long been needed, the need has been made even more urgent by the pandemic. Not only are Black communities throughout the Greater Toronto Area the hardest hit by COVID-19, but Black students who are already experiencing opportunity gaps will fall further behind in their schooling. In addition, Black students and staff, whose mental health is already affected by their daily experiences of racism, are more affected by the pandemic as well as by their continued experience of anti-Black racism throughout Canadian society.

We are heartened that, in this moment of crisis, we are able to respond to the calls for a bold and transformational strategy to dismantle anti-Black racism.

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# 1. Introduction

The systemic nature of anti-Black racism requires that school boards act proactively and boldly to achieve the goal of “education for all” and schools that are free from discrimination by challenging the unfair distribution of opportunities and the marginalization of Black students, families, and staff. Though interpersonal acts of anti-Black racism are traumatic and a form of violence, they represent anti-Black racism in its most conspicuous form. While ensuring that these acts are appropriately addressed, the underlying ideology of white supremacy and how it sustains systemic racism, and the resulting disparities and disproportionalities for Black students, must be given equal attention. Interpersonal racism works with systemic racism to create and perpetuate the unequal outcomes we see for Black students and staff, which then further reinforces the biases and attitudes that fuel interpersonal racism.

In addition, while much of the concern around racism in schools focuses on racial disparities in academic achievement — which is without question an important issue with profound consequences — schooling has a higher purpose than just grades and the production of a future workforce. A narrow focus on academic achievement means that the trauma of high-achieving Black students goes unnoticed. Learning environments also need to consider the extent to which they are affirming of Black identities, do not induce trauma and internalized racism, and provide environments in which Black students can flourish and become their best selves.

The implementation of this strategy reflects provincial initiatives and coincides with recent actions to address racism within the education system.

The Equity Action Plan was released by the Ministry of Education in 2017 and involves working with parents, educators, principals, Board staff, trustees, and the community to identify and eliminate discriminatory practices, systemic barriers, and bias from schools and classrooms. The Education Equity Secretariat is responsible for its implementation, and supports and funds the collection, analysis, and use of student demographic data. The YRDSB has conducted its Every Student Counts Survey and is currently analyzing the data. This data will be critical to establishing the baseline for Black students and measuring the impact of this strategy.

The Minister of Education revoked Regulation 274, which focused on hiring the best-qualified teacher into Long-Term Occasional and permanent positions based on seniority. The new Policy/Program Memorandum provides guidance to principals on hiring based on merit, diversity, and the unique needs of the school while also providing protocols to avoid nepotism.

The Anti-Racism Directorate (ARD) works to eliminate systemic racism in government policies, decisions, and programs and to advance racial equity. The ARD continues to focus on issues of anti-Black racism in the education system and provides guidance on the collection of identity-based data.

In addition, the Ontario College of Teachers is developing a new Additional Qualification guideline to address anti-Black racism.<sup>2</sup> The provincial government has also updated the Professional Misconduct regulation of the *Ontario College of Teachers Act* to include “making remarks or engaging in behaviours that expose any person or class of persons to hatred on the basis of a prohibited ground of discrimination under Part I of the *Human Rights Code*.” Allegations of hatred will be subject to the College’s established practice of investigation and, if warranted, public hearing and resolution.<sup>3</sup>



2. <https://www.oct.ca/public/media/announcements/college-addresses-anti-black-racism>.

3. [https://www.oct.ca/public/media/press-releases/2020/20201106\\_3](https://www.oct.ca/public/media/press-releases/2020/20201106_3).



## 2. About the Background Report and Strategy

Ontario's publicly funded education system is built on the fundamental principle that every child deserves the opportunity to succeed personally and academically, regardless of background, identity, or personal circumstances. This commitment is described in Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan:<sup>4</sup>

All students deserve to have every opportunity to reach their full potential and succeed personally and academically, with access to rich learning experiences that provide a strong foundation of confidence that continues throughout their lives. Schools should be safe and welcoming places where all students have the tools they need to achieve success and follow their chosen pathways to life after graduation including work, college, apprenticeship or university.

In response to continued evidence of anti-Black racism and the community's pressure to develop a strategy to dismantle anti-Black racism, the YRDSB contracted with Turner Consulting Group to develop a strategy that will guide the Board over the next 5 years.

This strategy includes two parts. Part 1 is this Background Report, which documents the need and context for a strategy to dismantle anti-Black racism. Part 2 consists of the Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy.



4. Government of Ontario. (2017). *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan*. Retrieved from [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/education\\_equity\\_plan\\_en.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/education_equity_plan_en.pdf).

While the final strategy is important for setting the direction for the organization, this Background Report was developed to support the strategy in a number of ways. First, this report will help all members of the YRDSB school community to understand how anti-Black racism manifests not only within Ontario's public school system, but also within the YRDSB itself. This report focuses on how the Board's policies, practices, and culture contribute to poor outcomes for Black students and staff and disrupts the narrative that these outcomes are the result of the perceived deficiencies of Black children, families, or staff.

Second, this report will help to generate the needed understanding within the school community to ensure the strategy's successful implementation. To change the system to better serve Black students and support Black staff, trustees, school leaders, educators, and others in the school community must understand the issues and the reasons why change is needed. Commitment to not only implement the actions in the strategy but also make real change that impacts the school experiences of Black students and the work experiences of Black staff requires an understanding of two key phenomena: one, how anti-Black racism operates through acts of both commission and omission, and two, how the ideology of white supremacy sustains anti-Black racism.

Third, this report serves the critical role of capturing the institutional memory of what has been learned in the development of the strategy.

The strategy is meant to be a living document that will be adjusted as needed. Through the accountability framework, the strategy will be updated periodically in response to data and feedback on its implementation, emerging trends, and changes in the sector. As such, this report will function as a resource when adjustments to the strategy are to be made.

## Goal

The goal of this strategy is to achieve racial equity in YRDSB schools for Black students and staff.

Racial equity is defined as the elimination of racial disproportionalities so that race can no longer be used to predict success.<sup>5</sup> Achieving racial equity includes focusing not only on outcomes but also on well-being. It means addressing not only opportunity gaps for academic achievement, but also creating learning and working environments that affirm the Black and other identities of students and staff.

While focusing on Black students and staff, the YRDSB also recognizes that the systems and structures that are actively and intentionally harming Black communities are failing everyone, economically and socially, both short and long term. As such, this strategy to achieve racial equity at the YRDSB will collectively benefit everyone in York Region.

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5. Government Alliance on Race and Equity. (n.d.). *Racial equity strategy*. Retrieved from <https://www.racialequityalliance.org/faq/racial-equity-strategy/>.



**Action without vision is only passing time. Vision without action is merely daydreaming. But vision with action can change the world.**

**Nelson Mandela**



## **Objectives**

The strategy has six key objectives:

### **1. Normalize conversation about anti-Black racism**

In order to dismantle anti-Black racism, it must be named and its systemic nature discussed. The visible disproportionalities and disparities that Black students and staff experience allow people to adopt racist beliefs about Black students, their families, and their communities. Rather than discussing the policies and practices that recreate and maintain racial inequities, oftentimes the student is made the focus of efforts to achieve race equity.

This strategy will support the YRDSB to define and discuss anti-Black racism and how it is manifested within the Board's learning and working environments. This strategy will also support conversations about the many forms that anti-Black racism takes, including ideological, structural, cultural, systemic/institutional, interpersonal, and internalized.

### **2. Operationalize anti-racism**

The inequities experienced by Black students and staff are not random and will not disappear on their own. While they have been created and sustained by the people, policies, and practices within the school board, they reflect the ideology of white supremacy born from the idea of racial inferiority, which was created to justify the enslavement of Black people. As such, the Board cannot be colour blind or non-racist, but must take an anti-racist stance if it is to achieve race equity. Staff who are, and who are supported to be, anti-racist, along with the operationalization of anti-racist policies and practices, are needed to create and perpetuate systemic racial equity.



### 3. Measure inequities and progress

Identity-based data must be collected and analyzed if the Board is to understand the issues facing Black students and staff and establish a baseline against which change will be measured. The analysis of the data collected through the Board's Every Student Counts Survey and Workforce Census will be critical to tracking progress, holding the organization and individuals accountable, focusing the Board's time and resources, and measuring the success of the strategy.

### 4. Build organizational capacity

All schools and departments must be committed to the breadth and depth of institutional transformation needed to achieve and sustain equitable outcomes for Black students and staff. While the commitment of trustees and senior leadership is critical, change for Black students takes place in the classroom, and change for Black staff at their worksites. As such, this strategy aims to build organizational capacity that changes how and what educators teach, how Black students are seen and supported, how Black families and communities are engaged, and how Black staff are hired and supported.

**5. Build capacity and commitment within York Region** This strategy recognizes that anti-Black racism is structural and thus is informed and reinforced by the ways in which institutions interact with each other. As such, the strategy aims to have the YRDSB courageously use its influence to work with other institutions, as well as the broader York Region community, to normalize conversations about racism, operationalize new ways of working together, and work in partnership across sectors and with the community to confront and dismantle anti-Black racism.

### 6. Use an evidence-based approach

Finally, this strategy is informed by research and what the evidence tells us about anti-Black racism. As such, this strategy supports a strong, coordinated, and focused start to dismantling anti-Black racism. Ongoing evaluation, which includes an ongoing assessment of the impact of the strategy, will allow the Board to assess the strategy's impact and refine the strategy along the way.







### 3. Methodology

The YRDSB used a collaborative process to develop this strategy. The Anti-Black Racism Steering Committee, consisting of students, parents, community organizations, school board staff, and trustees, was responsible for:

- Providing overarching guidance into the process for developing the strategy
- Providing input into the strategy's priorities and actions
- Reviewing the draft strategy, and
- Approving the final strategy.

A Working Group of 19 people, including Steering Committee members and school-based staff, was formed. It consisted of one student, three parents, one trustee, seven community leaders, and seven school board staff. This group worked closely with the consultants to develop the consultation strategy, review the data collected, and develop the draft strategy.

Over the months of August and October 2020, the following consultations were held:

- Community online survey (429 respondents)
- Staff online survey (285 respondents)
- Small group conversations with steering committee members (8 sessions)
- Small group conversations with community members, staff, parents, and students (10 sessions)
- Small group conversation with members of the Alliance of Educators for Black Students (AEBS), and
- One-on-one telephone interviews (5 individuals).

Black students and parents, school board staff, community leaders, members of the broader York Region community, as well as the Director of Education and senior YRDSB leaders participated in the consultations.

The consultations were designed to gather input in the following areas:

**Conduct an environmental scan**

What strategies and actions are currently in place at the YRDSB? How can they be leveraged? Are there opportunities for partnership with community organizations?

**Understand the key issues**

What are the key issues facing Black students and staff that the strategy should address?

**Identify potential solutions**

What initiatives or actions should be included in the strategy to address these issues?

**Implement the strategy**

What resources and supports need to be put in place to ensure the effective implementation of the strategy?

In total, almost 800 individuals provided input into the development of this strategy.





## 4. Developing the Implementation Plan

On its own, any strategy will not create change; a strategy is only as good as the implementation plan, the organization's commitment, and the investment of resources, creativity, and energy toward its implementation. While the actions within the strategy are meant to drive change, they do not guarantee the achievement of race equity. As such, what is implemented is just as important as how it is implemented.

In a large and complex organization with hundreds of worksites, a great deal of coordination will be required to implement the strategy and make the desired change. The strategy will need to be supported by clear communications and staff assigned to supporting its implementation. The implementation will also need to be led by someone who understands how to make organizational change, can move levers of change, and can manage the various actions and initiatives to drive that change. Staff will also be responsible for proactively addressing emerging issues that may affect the strategy's implementation. The documenting and sharing of learnings will be critical to disseminating useful actions and initiatives throughout the organization while also using any missteps as valuable learning opportunities.

The YRDSB itself will need to be bold and remain focused on the implementation of this strategy while also responding to a dramatically changing environment in the midst of a global pandemic. The organization will need to gain genuine understanding and engagement from school administrators by engaging and activating them as strategy champions, celebrating successes, and recognizing those who create Black-affirming and anti-racist learning and working environments. By doing so, a culture focused on dismantling anti-Black racism will be actively shaped and fostered.

This strategy spans 5 years in order to give the YRDSB sufficient time to make progress on implementation of the strategy's priorities and actions. The Board will create an implementation plan that will:

### **Specify when, how, and by whom the actions will be implemented**

Actions should be scaffolded and staged given the available resources, identifying when, how, and by whom the actions will be implemented.

### **Determine key performance indicators for each priority**

With the current baseline in mind, key performance indicators (KPI) should be identified that are a stretch, but reachable, for each priority. These KPIs will provide a stated objective to be achieved within a set period of time, against which results can be measured.



## 5. Building on Existing Work

It is important to recognize that the YRDSB is not starting this work from scratch. The Board has an ongoing commitment to education and employment equity and has a number of initiatives and strategies already in place to make a difference in achieving race equity within its learning and working environments. This strategy will build on the following existing work, although the list below does not fully capture the good work being done at the system level and within schools and classrooms:

1. The Multi-Year Strategic Plan, established by the Board of Trustees, guides system direction over a 4-year period. The current Multi-Year Strategic Plan includes a focus on the priorities of well-being and mental health, equity and inclusivity, collaborative relationships, and ethical leadership.
2. The Director's Action Plan includes goals to raise the achievement and well-being of underserved and underperforming students by building a collective understanding of the ongoing impact of colonialism on Indigenous communities, anti-oppression, and culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy. The Director's Action Plan references anti-Black racism, specifically the provision of identity-specific mental health and well-being supports for Black students and increasing understanding of the impact of the trauma of anti-Black racism on learning.
3. The Employment Equity Plan, created to address the issues identified through the Workforce Census and Employment Systems Review, will guide the Board's improvement of its human resources practices and its working environment to create a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace for all employees.
4. The Equity Action Plan calls for identifying systems and structures that limit students' potential, removing systemic barriers, and implementing approaches for providing equitable and accessible services for students.
5. The creation of an identity-specific social work team, including an African Canadian Caribbean Social Worker.
6. Equity Symposiums allow school administrators, corporate managers, professional staff and equity designates to engage in professional learning to support the implementation of equitable and inclusive practices in support of student achievement and well-being.

7. Equity and Inclusivity Student Conferences, which take place annually, allow students to continue their learning on issues of equity and inclusivity.
8. The Human Rights Commissioner's Office, established in 2018 as an arm's-length office for addressing matters specific to the *Human Rights Code* and the Board's anti-harassment and discrimination policies, is key to ensuring that members of the YRDSB community are assured of a fair process that addresses issues without influence from any other department or unit at the Board.
9. The YRDSB Leadership Framework 2020 is a tool for disrupting and transforming the ways in which school leaders and system managers learn about nurture and promote anti-oppressive praxis in their roles. It identifies anti-racism and anti-oppression as key competencies for superintendents and school administrators, initially and eventually for all roles including corporate management and professional staff.





## 6. Manifestations of Anti-Black Racism in the Education System

### 6.1. Defining anti-Black racism

The term “anti-Black racism” was coined by the Black community and social work professor Dr. Akua Benjamin. It was first referenced in 1992 in a government report prepared by Stephen Lewis on race relations in the province:<sup>6</sup>

First, what we are dealing with, at root, and fundamentally, is anti-Black racism. While it is obviously true that every visible minority community experiences the indignities and wounds of systemic discrimination throughout Southern Ontario, it is the Black community which is the focus. It is Blacks who are being shot, it is Black youth that is unemployed in excessive numbers, it is Black students who are being inappropriately streamed in schools, it is Black kids who are disproportionately dropping-out, it is housing communities with large concentrations of Black residents where the sense of vulnerability and disadvantage is most acute, it is Black employees, professional and non-professional, on whom the doors of upward equity slam shut. Just as the soothing balm of ‘multiculturalism’ cannot mask racism, so racism cannot mask its primary target.

Anti-Black racism has been a part of this country’s history since the first African person was enslaved in Canada. While African Americans who were fleeing enslavement viewed Canada as a land of freedom, they were met with anti-Black racism from individual White people, White communities, and the government. The historical record, which is largely untaught in Canadian history classes, suggests that Black people in Canada were generally treated with disdain and hostility in all aspects of society, including education, housing, policing, child welfare, and employment.<sup>7</sup> Without situating anti-Black racism within this historical context and acknowledging that anti-Black racism is inherently Canadian, present-day racial inequities can be dismissed by blaming Black people for the inequities they experience.

The Black Legal Action Centre defines anti-Black racism as “prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping, and discrimination directed at people of African descent.”<sup>8</sup> It is different from the racism experienced by other racialized groups because it has roots in Black Canadians’ unique history and experience of enslavement.

6. Lewis, S. (1992, June 9). *The Report of the Advisor on Race Relations to the Premier of Ontario Bob Rae*. Retrieved from <http://www.ontla.on.ca/library/repository/mon/13000/134250.pdf>.

7. Maynard, R. (2017). *Policing Black lives: State violence in Canada from slavery to the present*. Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing.

8. Black Legal Action Centre. (2015). *About BLAC*. Retrieved from <https://www.blacklegalactioncentre.ca/about/about-blac/>.



Black Canadians are comprised of a diverse mix of cultures, religions, backgrounds, and identities. While the experiences of Black Canadians are diverse, they do have in common the experience of anti-Black racism that is directed at people of African descent. Anti-Black racism can combine with other forms of oppression to affect their experiences. In addition, one's culture may mediate and be a protective factor in addressing racism. As such, while people of African descent may be impacted by interpersonal and systemic anti-Black racism, each person differs in the way they experience and navigate it. While some Black students and staff may be high achievers, not all will be unaffected by anti-Black racism. In fact, the trauma of racism may go unrecognized because Black students' achievements are sometimes mistaken for resilience.<sup>9</sup> Regardless of their own personal experience, these high-achieving individuals are also susceptible to vicarious trauma and may be impacted by the emotional residue of the trauma experienced by their Black peers.

## 6.2. Anti-Black racism in Ontario's education system

Ontario's education system is recognized as a top performer with a history of sustained improvement and as a model for the world.<sup>10</sup> Despite this distinction, research shows that Black students have not benefited from the education system in the same way that their White counterparts have.

Although, in theory, Ontario's public school system is designed to educate all children and prepare them to be confident and competent adults, in practice, these schools are also the sites in which anti-Black racism is reproduced and perpetuated against Black children. As Robyn Maynard writes:<sup>11</sup>

For many Black students, though, schools are places where they experience degradation, harm, and psychological violence. Even as education environments continue to under-serve many communities from different backgrounds, there are unique dimensions to the experiences of Black youth, who experience schools as carceral places characterized by neglect, heightened surveillance, and arbitrary and often extreme punishment for any perceived disobedience. Because Black youth are so often not seen or treated as children, schools too often become their first encounter with the organized and systemic devaluation of Blackness present in society at large.

In the 1800s, when African Americans came to Canada in increasing numbers, fleeing slavery and oppression in the United States, White parents lobbied their schools and the provincial government to keep Black students out of public schools.

9. Simmons, D. (2020). *Confronting inequity / The trauma we don't see. Learning and the Brain*, 77(8), 88–89. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may20/vol77/num08/The-Trauma-We-Don't-See.aspx>.

10. Hammer, K. (2010, November 26). Ontario school system ranks among best in world, report says. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/ontario-school-system-ranks-among-best-in-world-report-says/article567927/>.

11. Maynard, R. (2017, November 29). Canadian education is steeped in anti-Black racism. *The Walrus*. Retrieved from <https://thewalrus.ca/canadian-education-is-steeped-in-anti-black-racism/>.

In response, the practice of excluding Black children from attending local schools became commonplace and widespread.<sup>12</sup> Not only were Black children not welcome in local schools, but Black residents were referred to using racial epithets and school taxes were collected from Black property-holding residents to help pay for the very public schools their children could not attend. In response to pressure from White parents, the superintendent of schools for Canada West (now Ontario), Egerton Ryerson, allowed for racially segregated schools in the *Common Schools Act* of 1850. This provision remained in legislation until 1964, when it was challenged by Leonard Braithwaite, the first Black Canadian to be elected to the Ontario Legislature. The last segregated school was closed in Ontario in 1965.

While separate schools for Black children were established in numerous towns in southern Ontario, these schools did not receive the same funding as White schools. The school buildings were dilapidated, and the books and supplies they received — if they received any at all — were old and in poor condition.<sup>13</sup> In some parts of southwestern Ontario, Black children could simply not attend school because the nearest separate school for Black children was too far away.

Throughout the province's history, anti-Black racism in the education system has meant that Black parents have had to take individual and collective action to ensure access to education for their children. Black people in many communities across southwestern Ontario organized community meetings, formed committees to investigate the exclusion of Black children from public schools, and planned strategies to challenge incidents of anti-Black racism. Petitions and letters were written to school board trustees, Superintendent Ryerson, and other government officials to lobby for legislative change. Some Black parents engaged in direct action by bringing their children to White schools in an attempt to force their admission. Some parents refused to send their children to the segregated schools that were established by school boards. Black residents also brought their stories to both mainstream and Black newspapers to inform the public of what was happening and to garner support for their cause. Black parents also sought alternative ways to educate their children, including sending their children to mission schools established by Christian churches or paying to send their children to Black-operated private schools.<sup>14</sup>

Black parents also took their fight to the courts, suing school trustees and school boards in their effort to have common schools desegregated and equal funding provided to Black separate schools. In all but one case, the practice of excluding Black children from public schools was upheld by the Superior Court of Canada West (Ontario).

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12. Henry, N. (2019, May). Anti-Black racism in Ontario schools: A historical perspective. *Research & Policy Brief. Issue No. 1*. Retrieved from [https://www.turnerconsultinggroup.ca/uploads/2/9/5/6/29562979/policy\\_brief\\_-\\_no\\_1\\_may\\_2019.pdf](https://www.turnerconsultinggroup.ca/uploads/2/9/5/6/29562979/policy_brief_-_no_1_may_2019.pdf).

13. Cooper, A. (1994). Black teachers in Canada West. In A. Shadd, L. Carty, A. Cooper, et al., *We're rooted here and they can't pull us up: Essays in African Canadian women's history* (pp. 143–170). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

14. Ibid.

While Canada's history of anti-Black racism is rarely taught in schools, the continued presence of anti-Black racism throughout Canadian society has been documented by scholars and acknowledged by government commissions and task forces. They acknowledge that regardless of place of birth or length of time in the country, Black Canadians continue to face racism, which influences their life experiences and interactions with all major public systems, including education, policing, criminal justice, child welfare, housing, and the labour market. Anti-Black racism impacts not only their experiences within each system but also how these systems interact with each other to create and maintain racial inequities.

In order to develop and implement an effective strategy to dismantle anti-Black racism, YRDSB staff need an understanding of how anti-Black racism plays out in Ontario's public school system at both the institutional/systemic and interpersonal levels. In addition, it is important to recognize how anti-Black racism intersects with other forms of oppression to shape the experiences of Black 2SLGBTQ+ students, Black Muslim students, Black students with disabilities, Afro-Indigenous students, and Black students with other identities, as these students experience "a multiplying effect of intersectional identities, which creates physical, mental and emotional harm from many different angles."<sup>15</sup>

This section, which describes the various ways in which anti-Black racism is manifested within the public school system, informed the development of the anti-Black racism strategy, its priorities, and its actions. It documents the research as well as the thoughts and perspectives shared through the consultations for this strategy. While this section does not fully reflect experiences specific to the YRDSB, the analysis of the Every Student Counts Survey and the particular policies and practices of the YRDSB will be considered in the development of the implementation plan and the ongoing assessment of the impact of the strategy.

## 6.2.a Teacher biases and lack of racial literacy

Like all students, Black students thrive in classrooms when teachers see them accurately and show that they are happy to have them there. As Pirette McKamey describes,<sup>16</sup>

In these classes, students choose to sit in the front of the class, take careful notes, shoot their hands up in discussions, and ask unexpected questions that cause the teacher and other classmates to stop and think. Given the chance, they email, text, and call the teachers who believe in them. In short, these students are everything their families and community members have raised and supported them to be.

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15. Dillard, C. Black minds matter. *Teaching tolerance*. Retrieved from <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2019/black-minds-matter>.

16. McKamey, P. (2020, June 17). What anti-racist teachers do differently. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2020/06/how-be-anti-racist-teacher/613138/>.

In many classrooms, however, these same students are marginalized; they sit in the back of the class, put their heads down, and do not engage in classroom discussions.

Many studies point to the teacher, more than any other aspect of schooling, as the most important contributor to student achievement.<sup>17</sup> Critical to teachers' effectiveness is the impact of their biases on student outcomes. For instance, studies show that teachers' biases and personal feelings influence how they mark.<sup>18</sup> Other studies have found that when teachers and students shared similar personalities and backgrounds, the teachers overestimated the students' general abilities. Conversely, students who were dissimilar from their teachers were judged less positively.<sup>19</sup> The impact of teacher biases extend to gender, influencing how boys and girls are assessed in math. One study found that girls outscored boys in an exam graded anonymously, but the boys outscored the girls when graded by teachers who knew their names and gender. The researchers concluded that in math and science, the teachers overestimated the boys' abilities and underestimated the girls', and that this had long-term effects on students' attitudes toward the subjects.<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, studies show that these biases extend to race and impact the experiences of and outcomes for Black students. Researchers have found that the same behaviours are interpreted differently depending on the race of the child, leading to Black students being subjected to more suspensions, expulsions, and disciplinary actions than White students.<sup>21</sup> In addition, White teachers are less likely to accurately recognize emotions in the faces of Black boys than in those of White boys; are more likely to read Black faces as angry even when they are not; and are more likely to perceive Black boys' misbehaviours as more hostile than those of White boys.<sup>22</sup>

Another study suggests that White teachers' implicit prejudices or stereotypes can also make them less effective when teaching Black students. One study recruited White college students to prepare and present a history lesson to either a White student or a Black student.

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17. Oppen, I. M. (2019). *Teachers matter: Understanding teachers' impact on student achievement*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR4312.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR4312.html).
  18. Henry, J. (2013, January 6). Teacher 'bias' gives better marks to favourite pupils, research reveals. *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/9782323/Teacher-bias-gives-better-marks-to-favourite-pupils-research-reveals.html>.
  19. Kamenetz, A. (2015, February 24). Why the teacher's pet resembles the teacher. *KQED*. Retrieved from <http://www2.kqed.org/mindshift/2015/02/24/why-the-teachers-pet-often-resembles-the-teacher/>.
  20. Marcotte, A. (2015, February 10). Teachers give girls better grades on math tests when they don't know they are girls. *Slate*. Retrieved from [http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx\\_factor/2015/02/10/teacher\\_bias\\_in\\_math\\_new\\_study\\_finds\\_teachers\\_grade\\_boys\\_more\\_generously.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2015/02/10/teacher_bias_in_math_new_study_finds_teachers_grade_boys_more_generously.html).
  21. Jacobs, T. (2018, July 6). For Black students, stereotyping starts early. *Pacific Standard*. Retrieved from <https://psmag.com/education/for-black-students-stereotyping-starts-early>.
  22. Halberstadt, A. G., Castro, V. L., Chu, Q., Lozada, F. T., & Sims, C. M. (2018). Preservice teachers' racialized emotion recognition, anger bias, and hostility attributions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 54, 125–138. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2018.06.004>

When the “teachers” had higher levels of implicit racial bias, their Black (but not White) students scored more poorly on a history test based on the lesson. The researchers found that the teachers who gave lectures to Black students appeared more nervous, which seemed to impair the quality of their lesson.<sup>23</sup>

Throughout the consultations held to inform this strategy, participants repeatedly raised the issues of teacher bias, the biased lens through which Black children are seen, and whether teachers make any effort to engage Black children in learning. Consultation participants spoke of the various ways in which Black students are prejudged and seen through stereotypical lenses and the impact this has on their schooling year after year. Both Black and non-Black staff shared their observations of their colleagues inflicting hurt, harm, and trauma on Black students, and they spoke of feeling that there was no willingness on the part of the school board to examine the racist behaviours of teachers and the impact on Black students. Instead, they felt that Black students tend to be viewed through a deficit lens, with their families, community, and culture seen as the source of underachievement. Many participants shared their overall concern about the experience of Black students in YRDSB classrooms:

*Teachers look through Black students. These children just want to know that they are seen and heard in the classroom.*

*They are seen as the perpetrators of behaviour, specifically disruptive behaviour, without anyone taking the time to get to know them and their narrative.*

*They are often ignored. They are often subtly and not so subtly denigrated and dismissed. They are often perceived as less capable, without evidence, and even with evidence to the contrary. They are often treated as though they are not worth the effort of additional support, parental intervention, and the like. They are often perceived as aggressive without evidence, and even with evidence to the contrary.*

*Black students at YRDSB continue to be faced with racist slurs and comments. They are still viewed and treated as inferior. Another issue is the systemic racism in the education program. If they are not stereotyped and shut down they are made to feel invisible and that their lack of productive work is just fine.*

*The deeply entrenched White privilege / unconscious bias that exists at all levels of our system is a problem. Black students are never given a fair chance from the first day that they step through the door of a YRDSB school. Black students are judged differently than non-Black students in their classes — both academically, and for any minor infraction of the rules. Consequences are harsher, staff and administrators find ways to justify their decisions regarding consequences for Black children. Their interests and concerns are only ever given lip service.*

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23. Jacoby-Senghor, J. S., Sinclair, S., & Shelton, J. N. (2016). A lesson in bias: The relationship between implicit racial bias and performance in pedagogical contexts, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 63, 50–55. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2015.10.010>

*Teachers do not see Black students as having high potential, they are not treated the same as White students. They are discriminated against the minute they walk into kindergarten.*

*Staff are also too quick to assume the worst with Black students. Staff are also quick to justify and make excuses for students (non-Black) that bully Black students. Their unconscious Black bias is permeated throughout the school system.*

Educators, both Black and non-Black, shared that they are often warned about which students to watch out for and even told that some students, often Black, are violent and aggressive. However, they noted that they did not witness these behaviours from these students and assume that the issue is not inherent to these students, but how these teachers view and treat these students. They were concerned that by sharing these perceptions, educators prime other educators to see and treat these students the same way. Educators also shared their concern that in some schools there is a culture of fear of Black students, particularly Black boys, who are seen as inherently violent and lacking the capacity and desire to learn.

Other educators shared their concern that Black girls are often “adultified,” meaning that they are seen as less innocent and more adult-like than their White peers of the same age. Others noted that Black girls as young as 4 and 5 years old are described as “sassy” and having “an attitude.” Black girls therefore do not get treated as children. In turn, they are seen as less innocent, needing less comforting and protection, and as more responsible for their behaviours than their White counterparts. These harmful perceptions impact the way Black girls see themselves and the way others see and treat them.

Educators, both Black and non-Black, also shared the resistance they face to their anti-racist work. Rather than being seen as critical to helping all students understand, navigate, and change a world in which racism is embedded throughout society, these teachers are marginalized and penalized. As some noted:

*This idea that if you talk about these things in the classroom, you are pushing your own political bias. That's not what that is. Firstly, it's not bias to think that the police murder Black people. That's not bias. Those are just facts. And that goes back to that idea that silence only helps the oppressor. Your silence is not neutral. When you choose to stay silent about those things, that's not political bias coming out. And this allows other teachers to make excuses of why they can't or shouldn't or won't or whatever, rather than doing the work and figuring out how to do it well, you just spend your time making excuses for yourself.*

*The hierarchy sees social justice as dissent.*



Through the online survey, respondents shared their perspectives on the challenges that Black students face at YRDSB schools. Their responses indicated that while many have a sound understanding of these challenges, there are also many others who don't believe that there are any issues that require the Board's attention. In addition, others blame the poor outcomes for Black students on students themselves or their family or culture. When asked about the key issues facing Black students at the YRDSB, community members and educators shared that:

**They don't know what these issues might be**

*I honestly don't know as I have not seen or heard about this in any of the schools. I have worked over the years in the East area. These schools are all culturally diverse.*

**There are no issues, or no issues that Black students as a group face**

*No idea. Each student and their individual situations are all different.*

*Nothing. They're treated like any other students.*

*Only the issues that they make for themselves.*

**The issues are with the students themselves, in their home, or in their culture**

*The cycle of poverty and single parent family leaves kids behind. When they come to school there is a lack of support from home to follow through on key issues.*

*Some students are not motivated.*

*Absentee fathers.*

*They are not performing academically as well as their peers They may not have the parental support at home to encourage academic success.*

*I would say the biggest issue is parents, most of my child's Black friends have no male role model, mother is working many jobs. No stable home life and parent involvement. Too many single mothers, fatherless children... children out of wedlock ... having children before they create a career. You know, making bad choices.*

*Parents and/or community members of Black students are using race as a crutch for poor student performance, blaming systemic issues instead of working on building resilient, hardworking kids. Governments and school boards are thus lowering standards for Black students, and parents of Black students are not pushing their children to succeed and instead are blaming systemic racism.*

*Not enough parental support. Constantly being told there is so much racism. Please teach them resilience. They need to break the cycle and help the Black community overcome what is happening to them. Teach them that even though there is some racism, they can still achieve many goals.*

There are also survey respondents, including a few Black parents and students, who shared their feeling that the conversation about race and racism is a problem. When asked through the online survey about the issues that Black students face at the YRDSB, some answered:

*Race hustlers...*

*People like you... teach them everyone is against them because of their color.*

*People that see race in everything.*

*That I am told that I'm being oppressed, that my White friends don't like me because of my skin colour.*

*People that talk about race and only race.*

*None at all, racism is practically nonexistent. Anti-White racism is more prevalent in the curriculum.*

*The Board has chosen to politicize racial issues for Blacks and every other group with the exception of White students. Treat everyone the same and students will thrive. Implement racist strategies along the lines of extremist groups such as Black Lives Matter and leftist politicians and students will fail on every level. The Board must stop their obsession with identity politics!!*

*I just want to go to school and learn like my fellow students. I don't want to hear from Black teachers that they are the only one in my corner because they are Black and understand me. My Dad is White and Mom is Black don't tell me my Dad doesn't know me.*

*Pushing students through the system without them mastering basic academic skillsets will only continue to inhibit their success later in life when after leaving school they will be judged on work ethic, responsibility, attendance, and performance. These traits should be mastered above all and be encouraged by students' parents and the communities, instead of just blaming systemic racism for poor performance. There are many marginalized racial communities that are able to succeed and rise to higher socio-economic positions despite racism due to resiliency and being taught hard work and responsibility. A sizeable portion of the Black community has been less successful at teaching their offspring these values, and have used racism as a crutch for poor performance, instead of taking responsibility for their own success.*

Participants also shared their concern about the dual impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and racism on Black students and staff — the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted Black communities in the Greater Toronto Area, and the police killing of George Floyd and other Black people in both the United States and Canada has had a major psychological toll. As such, participants stated that they feel it is necessary for the YRDSB and all its employees to tackle the difficult work of dismantling anti-Black racism at this time. In addition, participants also expressed that the time was right for the YRDSB to engage in a much-needed conversation about anti-Black racism, since the language of diversity, inclusion, and equity is often used to avoid conversations about racism and how deeply embedded it is within the education system.

Supporting those within the YRDSB as well as those in the broader school community to understand systemic racism and engage in conversations about racism will increase the capacity of schools to meaningfully tackle anti-Black racism. Racial literacy is central to teachers' ability to teach and support Black students. Understanding the ways in which racism and white supremacy operate and are woven into the fabric of society's institutions will help teachers see and respond to the ways in which the education system can and does reproduce racism and racial inequities. Developing racial literacy requires the difficult and often uncomfortable work of exploring one's own racial identity, reflecting on the racist views one holds, and understanding one's role in perpetuating poor outcomes for Black students. For White educators and staff, it means reflecting on whiteness, white dominance, and white supremacy and how it is tethered to anti-Blackness. For racialized educators and staff, it also means doing the hard work of reflecting on how they uphold whiteness within working and learning environments and how anti-Black racism is perpetuated within their communities.

Many participants noted that increasing the racial literacy of staff is critical if the Board is to dismantle anti-Black racism. As some commented when asked about the issues that Black students face:

*Staff and administration DO NOT understand the systemic issues that the Black community face and therefore have no point of reference when teaching and disciplining. Black students are always viewed as “thugs” from dysfunctional homes and are adultified in terms of their behaviour. All behaviour is always related to the family situation even when the family is well established. Those students that stand outside the stereotype are looked at as an anomaly but this doesn’t necessarily support their success in classrooms. Students are valued for their entertainment and athleticism but seldom for their participation in other areas of school life (i.e. social clubs, etc.). When students share their school experiences with racism, it is dismissed and/or talked down to negate the seriousness of the situation.*

*Teachers are not trained to handle difficult conversations. They don’t address racist fellow students (my daughter has told me there are kids who use the N-word in the school playground regularly)... There is anti-Black racism among school staff and an unwillingness or inability to deal with anti-Black racism of non-Black parents and students.*

*The lack of knowledge and understanding of systemic racism by the staff who work with them, and the lack of knowledge, understanding, tools and resource to staff to be anti-racist and make real positive change.*

*Lack of mandatory anti-racism training for all teachers. Lack of a road map to embedding anti-racism/equality throughout K-12 to ensure students are aware and it doesn’t fall on a token course.*

Racial literacy is also important for Black students, as it reduces their vulnerability to the effects of racial discrimination from teachers and peers and leads to better educational outcomes. One study found that preparation for possible bias along with racial pride was a protective factor against the damaging effects of racial discrimination by teachers and other students.<sup>24</sup> This study found that preparation for bias was directly related to a sense of belonging to a school, while racial pride was directly and positively related to three out of four academic outcomes: grade-point averages, educational aspirations, and cognitive engagement. It was also directly related to resilience in the face of discrimination.

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24. Wang, M.-T., & Huguley, J. P. (2012). Parental racial socialization as a moderator of the effects of racial discrimination on educational success among African American adolescents. *Child Development*, 83(5), 1716–1731.

Given the importance of racial literacy and anti-racism, education and training in these areas should not be left to the discretion of individual teachers, school administrators, and staff. Instead, it needs to be a mandatory part of an institutionalized approach that is embedded within the work of all schools and all departments, to shape everything the YRDSB does. This learning should also be embedded in the curriculum, as it will help all students understand racism and also builds resilience among Black students.

The increasing racial diversity of the provincial population and the slow change within the teaching workforce has created a large teacher diversity gap that will not change for many years.<sup>25</sup> Teacher education programs therefore need to become explicitly anti-racist to ensure that new teachers are able to create anti-racist and Black-affirming learning environments in order to eliminate disparities in outcomes for Black students. The YRDSB can do its part by proactively seeking out and hiring employees who come equipped and are committed to creating anti-racist working and learning environments. The Board can also provide ongoing professional development and learning resources and opportunities to existing employees. Ongoing learning about white supremacy, anti-Black racism, and anti-racism will help to prepare teachers and school administrators to lead difficult and uncomfortable conversations with students, parents, and staff within their school community. Teachers and administrators must be prepared to disrupt and address racism in the classroom when it does occur, because not talking about race further invalidates the real-world experiences of Black students and retraumatizes them.

## 6.2.b Racist learning environments

Throughout the consultations, we also heard about the racist learning environments that some Black students were forced to endure and the hurt, harm, and trauma that these environments cause. Parents described teachers “seeing through” their children, seeing them as threatening, as well as seeing them as “throwaway kids” not worthy of being taught. Many parents argued that these incidents were not isolated events or the result of a “few bad apples” or insensitive “good” teachers. Instead, many agreed that anti-Black racism is systemic within the YRDSB, with many schools having an anti-Black culture in which Black students are set up to fail.

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25. Turner, T. (2014). *Teacher diversity gap*. Turner Consulting Group Inc. Retrieved from <https://www.turnerconsultinggroup.ca/blog-tana-turner/teacher-diversity-gap>.

Some participants described the impact on Black children as “spirit-murdering,” a term coined in 1987 by legal scholar Patricia Williams to describe the fact that racism not only inflicts pain, but is also a form of violence that steals and kills the humanity and spirits of Black people.<sup>26</sup> Participants described Black children as being isolated in classrooms by students, and that this isolation was condoned and facilitated by the teacher. They described a teacher who labelled a Black child as “bad” and did not allow other children to play with this child. They described Black children enduring years of racist bullying that was known to many teachers in the school; when the Black children did lash out, they were suspended. They described Black students having to endure being called the N-word as early as Grade 1. They also described Black children being called slaves by other children, because of what they were taught during Black History Month. They described Black students who have internalized their teachers’ low expectations and do not feel that they belong in academic-level classes. They described how Black students are pushed out of French immersion and other specialized programs by teachers in order to keep these spaces white. They described Crazy Hair Day and Twin Day as marginalizing and isolating for Black students. They described Black children giving up their academic pursuits in order to attend a school in which they could find a Black student community and feel a sense of belonging. They described children self-medicating and self-harming to cope with the daily trauma they experience.

Through the online survey, community members and staff shared their concerns that the racist learning environments that Black students are made to endure is one of the key issues facing Black students at YRDSB schools:

*From kindergarten, Black children are marginalized and othered and made to feel that they don't belong in our schools. If they are one of only a few Black children at the school, they have no one to play with, because the other children, whether White or other racialized, harbour anti-Black racism.*

*Other students are ignorantly racist and when students get upset, it's all dismissed as a joke or there being no evidence of such things.*

*Black students lack protection against bullying.*

*Lack of Black educators to make Black students feel safe enough to vocalize racism to someone who they trust will understand. When racism IS vocalized, racist teachers overlook it or dismiss it as non-racist, students are gaslit and used as trauma porn.*

*Outright racism from peers (name calling, bullying, exclusion from peer friendships).*

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26. Love, B. L. (2019, May 23). How schools are ‘spirit murdering’ Black and brown students. *Education Week*. Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/05/24/how-teachers-are-spirit-murdering-black-and.html>.



In the focus groups, educators shared examples of the experiences of Black students, both with other students as well as with teachers, including the following stories:

*I would usually get there when the kids were out for lunch already. I could tell when something had happened at recess or earlier in the day, just based off of the vast difference in personality that I would see in that Black student. I could tell, just from looking at them, that they looked like a deflated balloon. Like you could tell that they were just so beat down or that something had happened earlier in French class and the teacher didn't necessarily respond in the best way. Again, I could physically see it. And then it got to the point where when that student, the parent, finally decided she was going to move him to another school, he didn't even want to come back in and get his stuff because he was scared he would run into the boys. There was just like a dimming of a light because he was such a bright, like very outgoing child. It was so very visible and really sad. When I asked about it, the other students knew that he was being bullied. He had been at that school most of his schooling career and it was going on for years. Now he's the one who's having to move to another school.*

*There is a culture of fear in relation to the Black boys that is perpetuated in our schools. I see some of these students in other settings and they are a completely different child. But when he comes into the school building you can see a complete change in the way he walks. But again, I think the focus is always, well, what's wrong with this child? But why is it that when he comes into the space, he feels so threatened and unsafe that he needs to act this way to protect himself? But again, that's not the conversation because nobody until COVID and George Floyd people never wanted to say the word Black. So they wouldn't address how racism is being played out within our spaces. The school had become essentially a battlefield for Black boys and they're arming themselves against racism and some of that is by shutting down.*

Participants also described students clinging to a false sense of Blackness offered by the media, because Black students feel invisible in their school and in the school curriculum. They also described a curriculum that dehumanizes and discounts the experiences, perspectives, and identities of Black people by presenting a singular story of Black people, steeped in Eurocentric worldviews. Because the history of people of African descent is only presented in relation to slavery, or Black people are presented as athletes and entertainers, academic excellence is seen as counter to Blackness. As one person described:

*I have seen multiple Black kids who are doing well, dressing appropriately, speaking with appropriate grammar, getting good grades being ostracized by their peers for "not keeping it real" or "being sell outs" or "white-washed."*

While many staff may see evidence of racism, both Black and non-Black staff shared that it is not safe in many school environments to raise these concerns. Staff shared that when they do come forward with issues, they are going against a culture of silence and are often seen as the problem. They expressed the fear of speaking up about racism because of the potential long-term negative implications on their careers. They shared their perception that they would face harsher reprisal for being anti-racist than others experience for being racist. Students also shared that they were afraid to raise issues about racism out of concern that it could affect their marks.

Critical to the creation of anti-racist and Black-affirming learning environments is how incidents of interpersonal racism are handled by staff. Many of the parents, students, and staff with whom we spoke shared that when incidents do occur, they were ignored or poorly handled, thereby creating greater harm. Oftentimes, these incidents were seen by educators and school administrators as interpersonal conflicts, with both children being treated as equally culpable if the Black child responded either verbally or physically to ongoing racist bullying or being called the N-word. In addition, Black parents and students did not feel that the Board's policies and processes for dealing with racist incidents were sufficiently clear or known. As a result, the handling of racist incidents was left to the discretion of individual teachers or school administrators, with many participants sharing that they felt they had no recourse if the incidents were not appropriately addressed at the school level.

In discussions about whom to turn to should issues arise, most consultation participants fell into one of two categories: they either did not know about the Human Rights Commissioner's Office or, if they did, they didn't see the Office as a safe place to report issues because it is not thought of as neutral or confidential. As such, participants shared that it is not enough to have resources – the visibility of these resources is also an issue. Some pointed to the Toronto District School Board's (TDSB) Parent Concern Protocol as a best practice; the protocol is posted in the front office of each school as a large poster and also included on the TDSB's website. They felt that the YRDSB community could benefit from something like this protocol, which describes the steps parents can follow when they are concerned about a school-related problem or an issue affecting their child.

But they also felt that such a protocol needs to be backed by increased racial literacy so that teachers and school administrators are able to understand and address anti-Black racism when these issues are raised. They felt that mandatory, ongoing professional learning is critical to increasing the racial literacy of all staff. When discussing the need for training, many shared their concern about the equity training that has been conducted at the YRDSB over the years, which largely has been optional. Instead of having the training delivered by school administrators, many shared the need to have such training

facilitated by qualified equity specialists. In addition, rather than receiving one-off training, participants shared a desire for a multi-year tiered plan that offers ongoing, structured learning with ongoing opportunities for dialogue. They also shared a desire for the creation of communities of practice to support peer learning and the space to have conversations without being shamed.

Many felt that school administrators lack the tools and resources to interrupt and address anti-Black racism, while there were also those who felt that there is an overall lack of desire and accountability to address anti-Black racism. In discussions with various staff and community members, the consultants also identified that a contributing factor may be a lack of understanding among teachers and school administrators of their legal obligations under the Ontario *Human Rights Code* to ensure equity in education and to create learning and working environments free from harassment and discrimination. They felt that this work needs to be reframed from being a “nice to do” into a “must do” by strongly tying it to the obligations of individuals, school administrators, and the Board under the Ontario *Human Rights Code*.

Participants also stressed the need for all schools to be engaged in this work, regardless of the number of Black students in the school. While non-Black teachers with primarily non-Black students can feel hesitant to discuss and address anti-Black racism, anti-racist work means acknowledging that racist beliefs and structures are pervasive throughout society, primarily in non-Black spaces. While dismantling anti-Black racism may look different in these schools, this work is equally important for those who are not directly harmed by racism, as they may be complicit in perpetuating racism.<sup>27</sup> Some participants also echoed the work of Dr. Ibram X. Kendi, who wrote in *How to Be an Antiracist*, “There is no neutrality in the racism struggle... The claim of ‘not racist’ neutrality is a mask for racism.”<sup>28</sup> As such, they stressed the need for all YRDSB staff to be engaged in creating anti-racist and Black-affirming learning and working environments.

Particularly concerning for many was the anti-Black racism perpetuated by other racialized students and parents. While this subject is not often discussed, participants felt that students and parents from all non-Black communities needed to understand anti-Black racism and that it is unacceptable. The current approach of many teachers and school administrators — to ignore the issue or to dismiss it as “interpersonal conflicts” — allows racism to remain entrenched in the school community. Furthermore, this approach does not allow all students to develop a deeper understanding of anti-Black racism and to work together as part of the school community to create an anti-racist school environment.

27. Torres, C. (2020, July 30). All students need anti-racism education. *Teaching Tolerance*. Retrieved from <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/all-students-need-antiracism-education>.

28. Kendi, I. X. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. New York, NY: Random House.

“

**In a racist society, it is not  
enough to be non-racist,  
we must be anti-racist.**

**Angela Y. Davis**

”

The introduction of a clear protocol focused on dismantling anti-Black racism would give school-based staff guidance and confidence to deal with incidents when they do occur and ensure that responses are consistent across the hundreds of school settings at the YRDSB. Such a protocol would also send a clear message to all students, parents, and staff that interpersonal anti-Black racism is unacceptable and outline the actions that will be taken when it does occur. Clear procedures will also help Black students and parents advocate for themselves, as they will have clear expectations against which to compare the response of school-based staff while also being aware of other mechanisms they can access to have their issues addressed.

Staff shared their concerns about the role of their unions in addressing issues of anti-Black racism. Many felt that their unions were not playing an active role in dismantling anti-Black racism and could do more. The perceived requirement that staff must first raise their concerns directly with a union member creates a barrier for many; as a result, the individuals who name the issues of racism feel that they are silenced, and even punished, by both their employer and their union. The result is the perception that racist union members are protected, racist behaviours are allowed to continue, and Black students and staff are expected to continue working and learning in toxic environments. Participants strongly felt that unions need to be part of the conversation and part of the work to dismantle anti-Black racism at the YRDSB.

Participants also pointed to the need for the Board to discipline any staff and to report teachers to the Ontario College of Teachers. In addition, they felt that until equity and anti-racism are included in teachers' performance appraisals, teachers' behaviours that cause harm will not be corrected and will be allowed to continue.

## 6.2.c Racism of low expectations

Teacher bias contributes to the racism of low expectations, a phenomenon that occurs when teachers and school administrators do not expect Black students to meet the standard of achievement set for all students. The racism of low expectations is extremely subtle and can be an unconscious form of racial discrimination.

If teachers see Black students as being incapable of excellence in their schoolwork, they may avoid giving challenging work to Black students. This prevents Black students from learning as much as other students and from developing the knowledge and skills needed to perform at a high level academically. When this trend occurs throughout their elementary schooling, some Black students may enter high school unprepared to take academic-level courses. The racism of low expectations also means that even when they are prepared, Black students are streamed into applied rather than academic programs of study — and therefore are led away from the pathway to university.

Various researchers have explored the disparities in academic achievement between Black and White students, theorizing that it reflects the low expectations teachers have for Black students. One study found that when Black and White teachers evaluated the same Black student and were asked for their prediction about whether the student will finish high school and go on to university, White teachers were 12% less likely to predict that the Black student will finish high school and 30% less likely to predict that the student will graduate from university.<sup>29</sup> Participants also shared that the racism of low expectations may mean that teachers did not challenge their Black students to do their best work, because the expectation was that Black students couldn't do any better. There are also Black students who are just as intelligent and capable, but who don't get the same marks as their White and other racialized counterparts. Because teachers may not feel that Black students are able to produce work at this level, they may mark their tests and assignments through a biased lens, and may even feel that students are cheating and not turning in their own work.

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29. Gershenson, S., Holt, S. B., & Papageorge, N. W. (2016). Who believes in me? The effect of student-teacher demographic match on teacher expectations. *Economics of Education Review*, 52, 209–224. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2016.03.002>

## 6.2.d Hyper-invisibility

The streaming of Black students away from academic programs of study and specialized schools and programs based on teacher bias means that they are underrepresented, and essentially invisible, in many educational spaces, including in academic-level classes, gifted programs, arts programs, French Immersion, International Baccalaureate programs, and Advanced Placement programs.

While the Every Student Counts Survey data is not yet available to examine this issue at the YRDSB, data from the TDSB offers some insight. An analysis of streaming data from the TDSB in the report *Towards Race Equity in Education* revealed that while 4% of White students were in the gifted program, only 0.04% of Black students were — that is, only 23 students out of the over 5,000 Black students attending TDSB high schools. Other studies have identified French immersion programs<sup>30</sup> and arts programs<sup>31</sup> as also creating racially segregated programs within Ontario's public school system.

This hyper-invisibility in certain programs does not reflect a lack of capability among Black students. Instead, it reflects the discriminatory barriers that Black students face to entering these programs, the opportunities they are not provided, and the biased ways in which they are seen by their teachers. For example, research shows that bright Black students taught by Black teachers are more likely to be identified as gifted. Even with high standardized test scores, Black students are less likely to be assigned to gifted services by White teachers.<sup>32</sup>

Parents also shared that once a Black child enters these programs, it is a constant battle for them to remain there. A few parents spoke specifically of the challenges they experienced trying to keep their children in French immersion programs:

*It is a constant battle to keep your child in French Immersion. They are not accurately assessed and are isolated in order to push them out of the program.*

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- 30. Alphonso, C. (2019, November 6). French Immersion causes two-tier school system, data show. *The Globe and Mail*. Retrieved from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-french-immersion-causes-two-tier-school-system-data-show/>.
  - 31. Craig, L. (2017, April 23). *TDSB's arts high schools: Nearly twice as many white, wealthy students, OISE study finds*. Retrieved from [https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/oise/News/TDSB\\_arts\\_high\\_schools\\_nearly\\_twice\\_as\\_many\\_white\\_wealthy\\_students.html](https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/oise/News/TDSB_arts_high_schools_nearly_twice_as_many_white_wealthy_students.html).
  - 32. Toppo, G. (2016, May 10). Study: Black teachers more likely to recommend black students for gifted programs. *USA Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2016/05/10/study-black-teachers-more-likely-recommend-black-students-gifted-programs/84197122/>.



*My son started French Immersion in grade one. And I remember his French teacher was saying he's having challenges and suggested he had a learning disability. And I was thinking, yeah, he's just learning a new language. He's going to have challenges in the first year. So me and my husband, we got him a tutor. The tutor says he's so smart and he doesn't have a disability. And then he got a Black teacher, she said he was getting A's and a B+, as he does really well. And she's really good to say, you know, here's where he needs to improve. But if that grade one teacher had her way, he would have left French Immersion.*

*Towards Race Equity in Education* also documents consultations with Black educators and students in which the researchers heard that the whiteness of some of these gifted classrooms and programs meant that when Black students did enter these programs, they chose to return to the more diverse mainstream classroom in the end.

Underrepresentation in certain programs means that Black students are then overrepresented in other programs. Consultation participants shared their concerns that Black students are streamed into applied courses and away from more academically challenging programs of study:

*They are labelled as troublesome, loud and problematic. Behaviour is being used to justify streaming into applied/college classes.*

*Blacks are being streamed into lower-functioning classes early.*

*They are considered less intelligent and hence streamed.*

In addition, a narrow, Eurocentric curriculum has made Black people invisible in the curriculum.<sup>33</sup> While Black people have been in Canada since the 1600s, they have essentially been erased from the teaching of Canadian history. Furthermore, the history and contributions of Africa are largely excluded from the teaching of world history, which tends to focus on teaching European history from a Eurocentric lens. The erasure of people of African descent from the curriculum contributes to the perpetuation of anti-Black racism in two ways. First, students fail to understand Canada's history of anti-Black racism and the nature of systemic racism. Second, students fail to recognize the important contributions that Black Canadians have made to the building of Canada and the contributions of Africa to the world, perpetuating the negative stereotypes of people of African descent.

Consultation participants shared concerns about the lack of representation in the curriculum and the impact this has on Black students:

*Lack of representation in the curriculum, racist teachers and administrators, especially covert white supremacists on staff, all the Black history that IS taught, and rarely so, start from slavery, and slavery in Canada is not acknowledged. No Black scientists, engineers, inventors or most especially, Black medieval history. Anti-Black racism all throughout.*

*The curriculum lacks inclusion of Black history, Black leaders, Black achievements, Black contribution, Black excellence to world civilizations - including African, American and Canadian societies. The black child cannot identify him/herself in the halls of civilization or situate their successes, struggles, oppressive forces, calls to action that may lie ahead - he/she is left unaware of their past or potential future and goes away assuming all is well with the world ... We need to rewrite history to reveal the true history of Canada, America, Europe, and Africa. Racism is premised on ignorance. YRDSB must fight it in every form - from teachers, administrators, regulations, curriculum, or through lived circumstance at school.*

*There is a lack of connection to the curriculum, texts ... students receive a single “white” story of Canada.*

While Black History Month provides a significant opportunity to include people of African descent in the curriculum, those with whom we consulted shared a number of concerns about whether and how this has been implemented.

First, there was concern that some teachers simply ignored Black History Month and made no effort to integrate any learnings about Black Canadians into the curriculum. Whether due to lack of knowledge of the content or lack of desire to learn about and integrate the content, Black parents and students interpreted teachers’ failure to recognize Black History Month as a lack of concern or desire to ensure that Black students see themselves reflected in the classroom. Concern was also raised about the harm caused by some teachers owing to their lack of racial literacy and their singular focus on slavery during Black History Month, which reinforces, rather than challenges, problematic beliefs about Black people. Rather than using Black History Month as an opportunity to showcase past and present Black achievement, some teachers instill shame in Black students and fuel anti-Black racism among non-Black students. In the consultations, some Black parents described their children as becoming anxious and not wanting to go to school when February approached because of the shame and embarrassment caused by how their teachers chose to approach Black History Month.

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33. Miller, J. (2020, June 5). Why the Black struggle in Canada has all but been erased. Two historians explain our blind spot. *Toronto Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2020/06/04/why-the-black-struggle-in-canada-has-all-but-been-erased-two-historians-explain-our-blind-spot.html>.

While it is important for Black students to see themselves positively reflected throughout the curriculum, it is equally important for White and other racialized students to see Black people in the curriculum and hear their perspectives as well. This provides not just mirrors for students, but also mirrors into other cultures and perspectives, which allows them to grow their own thinking.<sup>34</sup>

While many consultation participants felt that diversifying the curriculum is necessary, they didn't feel that it is sufficient. Also needed is the implementation of anti-racism in the curriculum taught at YRDSB schools. This means moving beyond representation to proactively engaging in conversations about racism in order to develop the racial literacy of students.<sup>35</sup> They noted that for anti-racist education to be effective, it cannot merely be addressed in the "typical" subjects (i.e., English, social studies, and history), but must be embedded throughout all subject areas, including math and science.



34. Sims Bishop, R. (1990). Mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors. In H. Moir (Ed.), *Collected perspectives: Choosing and using books for the classroom* (pp. ix–xi). Retrieved from <https://scenicregional.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Mirrors-Windows-and-Sliding-Glass-Doors.pdf>.

35. Runnymede Trust. (2020). *Race and racism in English secondary schools*. Retrieved from <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/Runnymede%20Secondary%20Schools%20report%20FINAL.pdf>.

## 6.2.e Criminalization

Another theme that arose when participants explored the experiences of Black students is the school-to-prison pipeline. The school-to-prison pipeline refers to the growing phenomenon of pushing students out of educational institutions, whether directly or indirectly, and into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems; this phenomenon also points to the strong connection between school discipline and involvement in the criminal justice system. For many students, school discipline can lead to their first contact with the criminal justice system.<sup>36</sup> Once that initial contact is made, many students are then pushed out of the educational environment and into the criminal justice system. Once a child drops out of school, they are eight times more likely to be incarcerated than a youth who has graduated from high school.<sup>37</sup> In addition, 68% of all men in US federal prisons do not have a high school diploma.<sup>38</sup>

The social conditions that are the root causes of youth violence were explored in a 2008 report, *The Roots of Youth Violence*. The report identified education as the “root of the immediate risk factors” and explored five problematic elements of Ontario’s education system: safe school policies, the curriculum, the approach sometimes taken to guidance and counselling, the composition and training of the teaching workforce, and the way the education system can contribute to the criminalization of youth.

Despite the widespread use of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, researchers have found that these punishments do nothing to improve a student’s academic achievement, nor do they improve behaviours or school safety.<sup>39</sup> Researchers have also found that rising rates of suspensions and expulsions do not reflect higher rates of misbehaviour.<sup>40</sup> They point to school discipline as not being about students and their behaviours; instead, discipline is mainly about the choices the adults in the building make and the biases they hold about Black students. Schools with higher proportions of Black students have been found to be more likely to implement zero-tolerance policies and to use extremely punitive discipline.<sup>41</sup> While the punitiveness of a school’s discipline policy was positively correlated with the proportion of the student population that was Black, it was not correlated with students’ rates of juvenile delinquency or drug use.

36. Cole, N. L. (2019). *Understanding the school-to-prison pipeline*. ThoughtCo. Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/school-to-prison-pipeline-4136170>.

37. Schept, J., Wall, T., & Brisman, A. (2014). Building, staffing, and insulating: An architecture of criminological complicity in the school-to-prison pipeline. *Social Justice*, 41(4), 96–115.

38. Amurao, C. (2013, March 24). *Fact sheet: How bad is the school-to-prison pipeline?* Tavis Smiley, PBS. Archived at <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/tavissmiley/tsr/education-under-arrest/school-to-prison-pipeline-fact-sheet/>.

39. Nelson, L., & Lind, D. (2015, October 27). *The school-to-prison pipeline, explained*. Retrieved from <https://www.vox.com/2015/2/24/8101289/school-discipline-race>.

40. Heitzeg, N. A. (2009). Education or incarceration: Zero tolerance policies and the school to prison pipeline. *Forum on Public Policy Online*, 2009(2). Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ870076.pdf>.

41. Welch, K., & Payne, A. A. (2010). Racial threat and punitive school discipline. *Social Problems*, 57(1), 25–48.

Consultation participants shared concerns about Black students being over-disciplined, including a former student who shared her cousin's experience:

*He actually was going to break up a fight between students and then one of the guys hit him. And by the end of it, my cousin was suspended and the other kids got off with a slap on the wrist. That goes on your record. And I'm sure, you know, you then get that kind of social embarrassment among other students and then all the teachers know. And so he had that kind of image as someone who's fighting and been suspended already. So now teachers already got their back up when they taught him.*

When asked about the issues that were common to Black students, respondents to the online survey frequently identified over-discipline as an issue:

*Over-representation of students of colour being disciplined, suspended and expelled.*

*My daughter also had to deal with school administrators being dismissive of her concerns, over-discipline and misguided accusations based on her race. Many instances where she is the only student addressed for something benign while her White friends who are with her are doing the exact same thing (e.g. being in the hallway between classes) but are excused or not in any way reprimanded.*

*Over-policing and over-disciplining of Black students - especially in early elementary.*

*Disciplinary actions are unfair compared to other groups of students.*

*Discipline is often given differently and unfairly to Black or Black mixed students.*

Over-discipline also contributes to student pushout — when a student leaves their school before graduation — because of what happens at school. This is different from student dropout, which is when a student leaves of their own accord (e.g., to work or care for a child). Studies show that students are pushed out of school for a number of reasons, including punitive discipline practices, bullying, and school climate. High rates of expulsion and suspension, particularly for Black students, severely impact their school experience and take away their opportunities to learn. Students who are repeatedly suspended, or who are expelled, are likely to fall behind academically, paving the way to their leaving high school without graduating. The failure of schools to create inclusive environments free from racist bullying, bias, and harassment for all students leads to students being pushed out of the public education system.<sup>42</sup>

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42. ACLU of Northern California. (2008). *Schools for All Campaign: The school bias and pushout problem*. Retrieved from [https://www.nijn.org/uploads/digital-library/resource\\_1069.pdf](https://www.nijn.org/uploads/digital-library/resource_1069.pdf).

Suspensions and expulsions also increase the likelihood that a young person will leave school early and become involved with the criminal justice system, because being out of school gives youth greater opportunity to commit crimes, interact with other youth involved with criminal activity, and come into contact with the police.<sup>43</sup> *The Roots of Youth Violence* report references community workers who shared that suspended and expelled students were more likely to drop out of school entirely and often became involved with criminal activity. Furthermore, because these youth were not in school during the day, they experienced increased police surveillance. Quoting a report from the UK Department for Education and Skills, it was noted that:

Exclusion from school is widely recognized as a driver for wider social exclusion. It is highly correlated with unemployment and involvement in crime. In the words of Martin Narey, Director General of HM Prison Service (2001): 'The 13,000 young people excluded from school each year might as well be given a date by which to join the prison service some time later down the line'.<sup>44</sup>

Studies also find that Black students are more likely to experience school discipline for minor offences, particularly when discretion is allowed, with Black students being disciplined more frequently and more harshly than their White peers. The Council of State Governments Report found that Black students were more likely to be disciplined for less serious “discretionary” offences; when other factors were controlled for, a higher percentage of White students were disciplined on more serious non-discretionary grounds, such as possessing drugs or carrying a weapon.<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, a 2009 study concluded that the racial disparity in rates of school suspensions could not be explained solely by racial differences in rates of delinquent behaviour, and that this disparity in turn was “strongly associated with similar levels of disproportion in juvenile court referrals.”<sup>46</sup>

While most of the studies that examine the school-to-prison pipeline have taken place in the United States, Canadian data also identifies racial disparities in school discipline. While the YRDSB data is not yet available, TDSB data shows that Black students in the 2006–2011 cohort were more than twice as likely as their White and other racialized peers to have been suspended at least once during high school.

In fact, by the time they finished high school, 42% of all Black students had been suspended at least once, compared with only 18% of White students and 18% of other

43. Cuellar, A. E., & Markowitz, S. (2015). School suspension and the school-to-prison pipeline. *International Review of Law and Economics*, 43, 98–106. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.irle.2015.06.001>.

44. Cited in McMurtry, R., & Curling, A. (2008). *The review of the roots of youth violence: Volume 1*. Toronto, ON: Government of Ontario. p. 56.

45. Losen, D. J. (2013). Discipline policies, successful schools, racial justice, and the law. *Family Court Review*, 51(3), 388–400. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12035>

46. Nicholson-Crotty, S., Birchmeier, Z., & Valentine, D. (2009). Exploring the impact of school discipline on racial disproportion in the juvenile justice system. *Social Science Quarterly*, 90(4), 1003–1018. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42940652>.



racialized students.<sup>47</sup> In addition, TDSB data shows that almost half of the board's expelled students were Black.<sup>48</sup> Of the 213 students who were expelled over a 5-year period (2011–2012 to 2015–2016, 48% were Black students, despite their representing only 12% of all students.

In addition to adopting harsh disciplinary practices, many school boards have also introduced police presence in schools through School Resource Officer (SRO) programs. While the stated purpose of the SROs is to protect students and ensure safety at school, in practice, when police are used to handle disciplinary issues for Black students in particular, this can escalate minor infractions into criminal incidents. The presence of SROs also negatively impacts the learning environment for Black and other racialized students.

Various studies have shown that SROs do not increase school safety and may in fact criminalize students, particularly Black students. Studies show that once young people are put into contact with law enforcement for disciplinary reasons, many are then pushed out of the educational environment into the criminal justice system.<sup>49</sup> Others have also found that once students make contact with the criminal justice system, they are also unlikely to graduate from high school.<sup>50</sup> In fact, Christopher Mallet, a legal scholar and expert on the school-to-prison pipeline, has concluded that “the increased use of zero tolerance policies and police... in the schools has exponentially increased arrests and referrals to the juvenile courts.”<sup>51</sup> He has also noted that this disproportionately affects already marginalized students and their families, and that “very few of these young people are actually appropriately involved [with police], in that they do not pose safety risks to their schools or communities. Thus, the school-to-prison pipeline does not improve school or community safety.”<sup>52</sup>

Unlike the SRO program implemented by other school boards, police are not stationed in YRDSB schools. Instead, the partnership between YRDSB and York Regional Police (YRP) includes various levels of engagement, including direct school supports, specialized programs for youth and children, and direct system support. Direct school supports are provided by Youth Education Officers (YEOs). Secondary YEOs are assigned to three or four public, Catholic, or private secondary schools within York Region, while elementary YEOs are assigned to 28 to 30 schools.

47. James, C., & Turner, T. (2017). *Towards race equity in education: The schooling of Black students in the GTA*. Toronto, ON: York University.

48. Toronto District School Board. (2017, April). *Expulsion decision-making process and expelled students' transition experience in the Toronto District School Board's caring and safe schools programs and their graduation outcomes*. Toronto, ON: Toronto District School Board, Research and Information Services.

49. Cole, N. L. (2019). *Understanding the school-to-prison pipeline*. ThoughtCo. Retrieved from <https://www.thoughtco.com/school-to-prison-pipeline-4136170>.

50. Ibid.

51. Mallett, C. (2016). The school-to-prison pipeline: A critical review of the punitive paradigm shift. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 33, 15–24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-015-0397-1>.

52. Ibid.

The YEOs participate in special events such as community barbeques and student-run events, support Safe Schools presentations, conduct presentations to students (e.g., on cyberbullying, sexting, impaired driving), and work with administration if an incident has occurred at the school. YRP also provides specialized programs to students, including the Empowered Student Partnership program to promote safety in schools and the local community, safety learning at the Community Safety Village, and Youth and Policing Initiatives for youth who may be interested in a career in policing and are in need of positive mentorship. YRP also collaborates with the YRDSB at a system level on a number of initiatives, including Violent Threat Risk Assessment, Human Trafficking Support, and programs to avert youth from involvement in gangs and crime.

Despite not being placed in schools, the role of police in YRDSB schools was raised as a concern by students, parents, and community members:

*There's always been a weird police presence in schools that I've never understood. Having the police in the schools definitely made it uncomfortable walking in the halls. You need to have your back up or if they're walking down the hall, you need to walk in the other direction because, you know, they may think you're holding drugs or have it in your locker. Or you get questioned about being in the hallway. I felt like there was definitely like a little bit of intimidation there. Whether they were intending on it or not. The relationship between Black people and the police is not very good. And I know about that for myself as well, like when a police officer pulls me over, I never feel safe. I've never, ever felt safe.*

*It seems as if Black students have a '1 strike you're out' experience when it comes to challenges or issues within the schools. Schools with larger Black populations have police presence to 'keep them in line,' creating an environment that tells other students that they need to be protected from the Black students and also creating an environment of fear for the Black students that they need to be watched. This breaks down self-esteem and confidence in the children.*

*I would like the board to consider changing its relationship with the York Regional Police. I would like to see the removal of uniformed officers, as their presence immediately establishes a power imbalance and does not demonstrate the breadth of conflict resolution strategies that should be relied upon in society (i.e. they are always wearing a bullet-proof vest and carrying a gun). In a Canadian context, guns should only exist in the most extreme situations where public safety is in imminent danger. Students should not have to be subject to the tacit intimidation of a uniformed police officer, nor should they be desensitized to the seriousness of being in the same space as a deadly weapon.*

*Armed police officers have no place in YRDSB schools. Instead schools should have staff members trained in how to defuse conflicts and peoples in distress.*

## 6.2.f Over-diagnosis

Various studies have found that Black students are also more likely to be “diagnosed” by their teachers as having behavioural issues and learning disabilities and be put into behavioural and special education classes without professional assessment and diagnosis. The analysis of the TDSB data presented in *Towards Race Equity in Education* showed that a greater proportion of Black students, than White and other racialized students, were identified as having non-gifted exceptionalities (14% versus 10% and 4%, respectively) and non-identified special needs and/or an Individual Education Plan (IEP; 12% versus 6% and 5%, respectively).

The YRDSB has a different process from that used by the TDSB and some other school boards for identifying students with exceptionalities. While other boards may allow teachers to determine whether or not a student requires an IEP, even though they do not have a diagnosis or an identification, at the YRDSB a student is not identified as having a learning disability unless a complete assessment conducted by a regulated school psychologist has been administered. The process requires several people to be involved in an identification, which allows for many perspectives and contributions, including that of parents/caregivers. While the YRDSB data for Black students is not yet available, an examination of the data would determine how effective the Board’s process has been in reducing the over-diagnosis of Black children with behavioural issues and learning disabilities.

Despite this process, in our consultations many participants shared their concerns that Black boys in particular are being identified as having behavioural difficulties or special education needs. As one person noted, every Black boy in some schools they worked in had been identified as having special education needs. Those who participated in the consultations shared their concerns about Black students being over-identified as having behavioural issues or special education needs:

*The question that must be asked and that’s not asked is how many times Black families are asked to identify their children. I was asked to, very early for both my children. When my son was five they wanted him to be identified with a learning disability and flat out in front of me and asking me if he has difficulty speaking in his first language – like English apparently is not our first language. And there were many others. I remember literally all the Black families on my street having conversations and literally being like, is it your turn to have the conversation about identifying your child?*

*From as early as JK, Black children are referred for lack of social skills, school readiness and overall “behaviour.” This is both boys and girls, because they don’t exhibit the expected docility and model behaviour. There are issues concerning special education programs and disproportionate numbers of Black students in these classes.*

Various studies have shown that Black boys are the most likely to receive special education services and the least likely to be enrolled in honours classes. One study found that for all Black, White, and Hispanic students, 6.5% were receiving special education services, 9.7% had an IEP, and 25% were in honours classes. For Black boys, 9% were receiving special education services, 14.7% had an IEP, and 14.5% were enrolled in honours classes.<sup>53</sup> Of Black boys in Grade 9 who were receiving special education services, 84% had a diagnosed disability and 15.5% had never been diagnosed.<sup>54</sup>

Studies have also shown that teachers are likely to interpret students' misbehaviour differently depending on the student's race and the racial make-up of the school. As a result, depending on the school, Black students may be identified as having special needs or a learning disability either too often or not often enough. One study found that in schools where the majority of the student population is White, a larger proportion of Black students are classified as having a disability than in schools where almost all students are Black or Hispanic.<sup>55</sup> Another study found that racialized students were more likely to be identified as emotionally disturbed or intellectually disabled if they attended a predominantly White school.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, *Towards Race Equity in Education* found that some children from the Caribbean whose only language is English, or those from Africa who speak English as one of a number of languages, reported that they were labelled as English language learners simply because they speak with a non-Canadian accent. As such, they were placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) or English Language Learners (ELL) classes without any formal assessment, resulting in a parent having to advocate to have their child placed in a mainstream classroom.

In the consultations, participants shared how this trend of over-diagnosis begins even before Black children start kindergarten. One teacher shared how the Welcome to Kindergarten sessions held to introduce both children and parents to the classroom environment are used by educators to assess students, often through a biased lens. They shared how educators meet afterward to discuss the students' behaviours and identify which students will be problematic and which teachers they will be assigned to. Staff

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53. Toldson, I. A. (n.d.). *How Black boys with disabilities end up in honors classes—While others without disabilities end up in special education*. Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color. Retrieved from <https://coseboc.org/news-article/black-boys-disabilities>.

54. Ibid.

55. Elder, T. E., Figlio, D. N., Imberman, S. A., & Persico, C. L. (2019). *School segregation and racial gaps in special education identification*. NBER Working Paper No. 25829. Retrieved from <https://www.nber.org/papers/w25829>.

56. Fish, R. E. (2019). Standing out and sorting in: Exploring the role of racial composition in racial disparities in special education. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(6), 2573–2608. <https://doi.org/10.3102%2F0002831219847966>.

pointed out that before even getting to know these students, they are labelled as having behavioural and learning issues. This labelling then impacts how these students are treated in the classroom and consequently the outcomes for these students, as a teacher's perceptions often become a self-fulfilling prophecy. These assessments are included in the students' files, which are then read and accepted by other teachers, impacting the students' schooling in subsequent years.

In addition, there were concerns expressed about the over-referral of Black families to Children's Aid. As documented by the One Vision One Voice project, the data shows that Black children are over-referred to child welfare not because there is greater abuse or neglect in the Black community, but because of the biases held by those with a legal duty to report suspected abuse or neglect.<sup>57</sup>

## 6.2.g Marginalization of Black parents and communities

Black parents shared their understanding that once they send their children off to school, they will confront anti-Blackness in the school environment, in the curriculum, from other students, and even from school staff. Black parents also recognize that educators and school administrators far too often view Black students, parents, and communities through a deficit mindset, treating Black parents and communities as the source of poor student outcomes rather than focusing their attention on schools and educators that marginalize and underserve Black students. As such, Black parents and community members recognized the important role of engagement and advocacy if Black children are to receive the education that all children are promised and deserve.

Some Black community agencies also voiced concerns that they are not engaged by the schools in their community. They shared that even with the many community agencies willing to offer their support during Black History Month events or to help schools address issues of anti-Black racism, school administrators are hesitant to engage with them.

Black parents shared that they feel concerned for their children's well-being when they leave them in the care of the YRDSB and the additional burden placed on them as parents to advocate for their children in order to ensure that their children both receive a good education and are not mentally harmed in the process. As some parents noted:

*I can't trust the system with my children. I need to be vigilant because I know what they do.*

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57. Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies. (2016). *One Vision One Voice: Changing the child welfare system to better serve African Canadians. Practice framework part 1: Research report*. Retrieved from [http://www.oacas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/One-Vision-One-Voice-Part-1\\_digital\\_english-May-2019.pdf](http://www.oacas.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/One-Vision-One-Voice-Part-1_digital_english-May-2019.pdf).

*We are sending our children in harm's way. Every day the school chips away at them. They come home and we need to build them back up, only to have to send them back to school the next day.*

*Our children are called the N-word daily and nothing is done. So we must go to battle to defend our children.*

*Our children's lives have to matter and have to matter in the place they spend most of their time.*

*They have weaponized a system designed to support our children.*

In addition to the issues faced by Black students in the school system, Black parents face challenges when advocating for their children. A key challenge articulated by Black parents is that their advocacy is not always welcomed by teachers or the school system, even as parents seek to challenge a school system that marginalizes and dehumanizes their children.<sup>58</sup> Many Black parents shared how poorly they were treated by teachers and school administrators when advocating for their children. They cited assumptions that were made about Black parent involvement, and that if the parent is not visible, they are seen as uninvolved. Black parents also described the resistance they experience when they do come to the school to advocate for their children, and their fear that naming anti-Black racism would only make the situation worse for their children. Some also noted that more resources are needed for parents to understand the school system, how to navigate it, what their rights are, and whom to turn to should issues arise.

These concerns shared by Black teachers and parents are common and echo those captured in *An Assessment of the Needs of Black Parents*.<sup>59</sup> Black parents reported feeling that they are stereotyped by teachers and school administrators as single parents who live in poverty, place low value on their child's education, and are not as engaged; as such, they and their concerns are dismissed. Black parents recognize that advocating on behalf of their children is not always welcomed by teachers or the school system. In fact, their advocacy can cause further harm to their children in the teacher's classroom. As one educator noted:<sup>60</sup>

*So while Black parents need to advocate, how is that perceived by teachers in the school? Sometimes it's taken up to be angry Black parents; Black parents are*

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58. Turner, T., Boyce, T., & Butler, A. (2020). *Assessment of the needs of Black parents in Ontario*. Toronto, ON: Turner Consulting Group Inc. Retrieved from [https://www.turnerconsultinggroup.ca/uploads/2/9/5/6/29562979/report\\_1\\_-\\_needs\\_assessment\\_-\\_final\\_-\\_june\\_15.pdf](https://www.turnerconsultinggroup.ca/uploads/2/9/5/6/29562979/report_1_-_needs_assessment_-_final_-_june_15.pdf).

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.



*confrontational. I've heard of cases where parents have been banned from school property because they're advocating for their children.*

Black parents who are teachers themselves are acutely aware of the impact of this stereotype on their child's education. In a study of the experiences of Black educators, a Black teacher shared the following:<sup>61</sup>

*Even though I have a well-paying job, I'm still dealing with stuff like any other Black parent in Ontario where I make sure my kids look a certain way and when we have parent-teacher meetings that both my husband and I go because I don't want to go by myself and have them think that I'm a single Black parent — I'm conscious of that. All Black parents are conscious of that and then of course the kids will be conscious of that. You have to actually learn to navigate the unfairness, the inequity of their schooling because they don't want their teacher to think a certain thing.*

## 6.2.h Black teachers and school administrators

Current research reinforces that Black teachers, by nearly every metric, are more successful at supporting the achievement and well-being of Black children than their non-Black counterparts. Studies show that Black students who have even one Black teacher during elementary school are more likely to graduate from high school and consider college.<sup>62</sup> Black students with Black teachers experience less school discipline and fewer office visits.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, racialized and Indigenous teachers boost the academic performance of all Indigenous and racialized students, resulting in improved reading and math test scores, improved graduation rates, and increased aspirations to pursue post-secondary education.<sup>64</sup> In addition, both racialized and White students report having positive perceptions of their racialized teachers, including feeling cared for and being academically challenged.

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61. Turner, T. (2015, May 29). *Voices of Ontario Black educators: An experiential report*. Toronto, ON: Turner Consulting Group and Ontario Alliance for Black School Educators. Retrieved from [http://onabse.org/ONABSE\\_VOICES\\_OF\\_BLACK\\_EDUCATORS\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://onabse.org/ONABSE_VOICES_OF_BLACK_EDUCATORS_Final_Report.pdf).
  62. Gershenson, S., Hart, C. M. D., Lindsay, C. A., & Papageorge, N. W. (2018). *The long-run impacts of same-race teachers*. NBER Working Paper No. 25254. Retrieved from [https://aefpweb.org/sites/default/files/webform/42/LongRunMismatch\\_AEFP.pdf](https://aefpweb.org/sites/default/files/webform/42/LongRunMismatch_AEFP.pdf).
  63. Lindsay, C. A., & Hart, C. (2017). Exposure to same-race teachers and student disciplinary outcomes for black students in North Carolina. *Psychology*, 39(3), 485–510. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Exposure-to-Same-Race-Teachers-and-Student-Outcomes-Lindsay-Hart/185d2b03214b3ba8a3b1e6d5ba1590bdf071d5367p2df>.
  64. Carver-Thomas, D. (2018). *Diversifying the teaching profession: How to recruit and retain teachers of color*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from [https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Diversifying\\_Teaching\\_Profession\\_REPORT\\_0.pdf](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Diversifying_Teaching_Profession_REPORT_0.pdf).

Research also shows that children learn best when educators and administrators are culturally competent, which creates cultural safety and allows students to fully engage in learning. Educator Zaretta Hammond's research on the brain shows that the social engagement part of the brain will not seek to connect with others if it perceives them to be threatening to social and/or psychological well-being. The more the brain has to focus on minimizing social threats and getting to safety, the less capacity there is for learning. Hammond also notes that neuroscience research indicates that the brain feels safest and most relaxed when people are connected to others whom they trust will treat them well. Positive relationships keep one's safety-threat detection system in check, cause oxytocin (a bonding hormone) to be secreted, and prevent the release of the stress hormone cortisol, which stops all learning for 20 minutes and stays in the body for up to 3 hours.<sup>65</sup>

Many Black teachers and school administrators shared that they have experienced the same hurt, harm, and trauma that Black students do as a result of the daily experiences of overt and subtle forms of racism. They shared feeling unwelcomed by both staff and parents within their school communities. They described an environment that is not supportive of Black educators and staff, in which their voice is not valued and their abilities are questioned. They also described the enormous pressure to be perfect because errors only serve to reinforce perceptions that they are unqualified and allow for their abilities and expertise to be challenged. As one person shared:

*There's so much professionalism and great teachers and support staff from the Black community that feel stonewalled. They feel blocked. They feel pushed out. They feel like their ideas and their suggestions or recommendations or initiatives go without any support from the administration. They feel like when they go in for promotions that they're being blocked for some reason, if they even begin to emerge as being "too Black," too supportive of Black issues and Black students, they feel like they're sidelined and pushed to the margins.*

They described the burden of having to shoulder anti-racism work because their non-Black colleagues do not see it as collective work but instead as the sole responsibility of Black staff. They described the personal and professional toll of repeatedly standing up against the racism that they and their students experience. They note that speaking up against racism takes a mental and physical toll on them, with some describing that they are experiencing racial battle fatigue, defined as the psychological, emotional,

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65. Hammond, Z. L. (2014). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

physiological, and time-related cost of fighting against racism.<sup>66</sup> The impact on their psychological and physical well-being includes anxiety, anger, hopelessness, depression, hypertension, sleeplessness, and extreme fatigue.<sup>67</sup>

Despite the benefits they bring to student achievement, Black teachers described having a harder time being hired and often experience racially hostile and unwelcoming environments. They shared their perception that systemic racism is embedded into the structures, policies, and practices of the school board and individual schools, impacting whether and how Black teachers are hired, how they are assessed, and whether they are supported to advance. The interpersonal racism they directly experience adds another layer to their experience, creating unwelcoming and unsupportive work environments. In addition, witnessing acts of racism and needing to intervene when they are directed at Black students, families, or communities takes an additional toll on their well-being.<sup>68</sup>

A number of the Black teachers with whom we spoke described their experiences of being the only Black educator in a school and the challenges of navigating a predominantly White profession and school board. They shared that it was an isolating experience in which they were left to navigate racist and unwelcoming workspaces without support. They described work environments that can be emotionally and psychologically taxing, particularly because there is no escape from racism and no acknowledgement of its existence. They also described the immense sense of responsibility they feel to create Black-affirming spaces for students, recognizing that they will likely be the only Black teacher many of their students will have. As some Black educators commented:

*If you're the only one in the building and if you take a stand against racism, you stand alone. Many Black staff are afraid because you could spend your whole career isolated.*

*There is a culture of fear in the organization, and fear of what could happen to you and your career if you take an anti-racist stance.*

*There is a lack of safe space to engage in anti-racist discussions and work. There is no one to turn to when issues arise. Not our union. Not a third party.*

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66. Smith, W. A. (2009). Campuswide climate: Implications for African American students. In L. C. Tillman (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of African American education* (pp. 297–309). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publishing.

67. Pizarro, M., & Kohli, R. (2018). "I stopped sleeping": Teachers of color and the impact of racial battle fatigue. *Urban Education*, 55(7), 967–991. Retrieved from <https://www.sjsu.edu/people/marcos.pizarro/publications/PizarroKohliRBF2018.pdf>.

68. Ibid.

*There is the feeling that if you do speak about anti-racism or you do call things out, there will be backlash and it will affect your opportunities. And so you carry that burden. And you can't say anything if you want to land a permanent job or find opportunities and be promoted.*

Also of concern is the double burden faced by Black staff who are also parents of children in the school system:

*It's stressful and traumatic. Black teachers face the same trauma that our Black students face. A lot of them are parents. So it's double. You send your child off to school to be retraumatized and you head off to work to face the same sort of trauma in your place of work.*

A number of Black students with whom we spoke also reported that they have never had or even seen a Black teacher throughout their years of schooling at the YRDSB. This is concerning for a number of reasons. First, these Black students were not able to reap the many benefits of having a Black teacher. Second, by not seeing a Black teacher or school administrator, these students may not see teaching as a profession that they can aspire to, further perpetuating the underrepresentation of Black educators throughout the province. Third, the lack of Black educators can also reinforce anti-Black racism when non-Black students and members of the community don't see Black people in positions of responsibility or leadership. Seeing teachers and other staff from diverse racial backgrounds also helps prepare all students to live and work in an increasingly diverse country and a multicultural world.



# GLOSSARY

## **African Canadians / Black Canadians / Black people**

The terms African Canadians, Black Canadians, and Black people are used interchangeably to refer to all people of sub-Saharan African ancestry residing in Canada, regardless of whether they arrived in Canada directly from their ancestral homeland on the continent of Africa or from other parts of the world. These terms include all people of African descent residing in Canada, regardless of their citizenship status.

## **Anti-Black racism**

Anti-Black racism is prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping, and discrimination directed at people of African descent and rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement. Anti-Black racism is deeply entrenched in Canadian institutions, policies, and practices, such that anti-Black racism is either functionally normalized or rendered invisible to the larger White society. Anti-Black racism is manifested in the legacy of the current social, economic, and political marginalization of African Canadians in society as evidenced by the lack of opportunities, lower socioeconomic status, higher unemployment, significant poverty rates, and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system.<sup>69</sup>

## **Anti-racist curriculum**

An anti-racist curriculum involves showing how the history of modernity is shaped by racism, colonialism, and white supremacy. From this more critical understanding of history, students and teachers could begin to better understand the forces that shape contemporary racial inequalities. Anti-racist education should be based on an understanding of racism as a structural and historical phenomenon as well as an interpersonal one. Through this re-envisioning of the curriculum, White students could be engaged with considerations of white privilege, power, and complicity in order to better understand and question their position in contemporary society. Simultaneously, Black, Indigenous, and other racialized students might also engage with content that prepares them for life in a racist society.<sup>70</sup>

## **Culturally responsive pedagogy**

Culturally responsive pedagogy is a student-centered approach to teaching in which the students' unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student's cultural place in the world. Culturally responsive pedagogy is divided into three functional dimensions: the institutional dimension, the personal dimension, and the instructional dimension.<sup>71</sup>

69. Government of Ontario. (2017, March 7). *A better way forward: Ontario's 3-year anti-racism strategic plan*. Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/page/better-way-forward-ontarios-3-year-anti-racism-strategic-plan>.

70. Runnymede Trust. (2020). *Race and racism in English secondary schools*. Retrieved from <https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/publications/pdfs/Runnymede%20Secondary%20Schools%20report%20FINAL.pdf>.

71. Lynch, M. (2018, April 21). *What is culturally responsive pedagogy?* Retrieved from <https://www.theedadocate.org/what-is-culturally-responsive-pedagogy/>.

The institutional dimension of culturally responsive pedagogy emphasizes the need for reform of the cultural factors affecting the organization of schools, school policies and procedures, and community involvement. The personal dimension refers to the process by which teachers learn to become culturally responsive. The instructional dimension refers to practices and challenges associated with implementing cultural responsiveness in the classroom.

### **Cultural safety**

The goal of cultural safety is for all people to feel respected and safe when they interact with various systems. Culturally safe environments are spiritually, socially, emotionally, and physically safe; where there is no assault, challenge, or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge, and the experience of learning together.<sup>72</sup>

Culturally safe practices include actions that recognize and respect the cultural identities of others and safely meet their needs, expectations, and rights. Alternatively, culturally unsafe practices are those that “diminish, demean or disempower the cultural identity and well-being of an individual.”<sup>73</sup>

An important principle of cultural safety is focusing on one’s own culture and its influence on how one thinks, feels, and behaves, rather than on what makes someone else different. Cultural safety is primarily about examining one’s own cultural identities and attitudes, and being open-minded and flexible in one’s attitudes toward people from cultures other than one’s own.<sup>74</sup>

### **Discrimination**

Treating someone unfairly by imposing a burden on them, or denying them a privilege, benefit, or opportunity enjoyed by others, because of their race, citizenship, family status, disability, sex, or other personal characteristics.<sup>75</sup>

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72. Williams, R. (1999). Cultural safety — What does it mean for our work practice? *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 23(2), 213–214.

73. Nursing Council of New Zealand. (2002). *Guidelines for cultural safety, the treaty of Waitangi, and Maori health in nursing and midwifery education and practice*. Wellington, NZ: Nursing Council of New Zealand.

74. Cultural Connections for Learning. (n.d.). *Cultural safety*. Retrieved from [http://www.intstudentsup.org/diversity/cultural\\_safety/](http://www.intstudentsup.org/diversity/cultural_safety/).

75. Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2013). *Teaching human rights in Ontario—A guide for Ontario schools*. Retrieved from <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/es/node/10772>.



**Equity (in education)**<sup>76</sup>

A condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all students, families, and staff regardless of social and cultural backgrounds, social identities, or personal life circumstances. Equitable treatment of students means removing discriminatory barriers to teaching and learning, and ensuring proportionate levels of support to those who need it the most, in order to improve student achievement and well-being and to close achievement gaps. Equitable treatment is not the same as equal treatment.

**Ideological racism**

Any oppressive system has at its core the idea that one group is better than another and has the right to control other groups. This ideology describes the dominant group as more intelligent, harder working, more capable, more deserving, superior, and so on. The opposite qualities are attributed to other groups.<sup>77</sup> White supremacy is the ideology that created and reinforces anti-Black racism.

**Interpersonal racism**

Interpersonal racism occurs between individuals. Once private beliefs come into interactions with others, racism enters the interpersonal realm.<sup>78</sup> Examples include public expressions of racial prejudice, hate, bias, and bigotry between individuals. Interpersonal and institutional racism function both independently and in concert.

**Intersectionality**<sup>79</sup>

Intersectionality acknowledges the ways in which people's lives are shaped by their multiple and overlapping identities and social locations, which, together, can produce a unique and distinct experience for that individual or group, for example, creating additional barriers or opportunities. In the context of race, this means recognizing the ways in which people's experiences of racism or privilege, including within any one racialized group, may differ and vary depending on the individual's or group's additional overlapping (or "intersecting") social identities, such as ethnicity, Indigenous identification, experiences with colonialism, religion, gender, citizenship, socio-economic status, or sexual orientation.

76. York Region District School Board. (2017). *Equity action plan: A vision for transformation*. Retrieved from <https://yrdsb.civicweb.net/document/86969>.

77. Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training.

78. Lawrence, K., & Keleher, T. (2004). *Chronic disparity: Strong and pervasive evidence of racial inequalities*. Race and Public Policy Conference. Retrieved from <https://www.intergroupresources.com/rc/Definitions%20of%20Racism.pdf>.

79. York Region District School Board. (2017). *Equity action plan: A vision for transformation*. Retrieved from <https://yrdsb.civicweb.net/document/86969>.

## Marginalization

A long-term, structural process of systemic discrimination that creates a class of disadvantaged minorities. These groups become permanently confined to the margins of society; their status is continually reproduced because of the various dimensions of exclusion, particularly in the labour market, but it also prevents their full and meaningful participation in society.<sup>80</sup>

## Oppression

Systemic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging of certain social identities in contrast to the privileged norm; when some people are denied something of value while others have ready access.<sup>81</sup>

## Race

Race is a “social construct.” This means that society forms ideas of race based on geographic, historical, political, economic, social, and cultural factors, as well as physical traits, even though none of these can legitimately be used to classify groups of people.<sup>82</sup>

## Racialization

The process through which groups come to be socially constructed as races, based on characteristics such as ethnicity, language, economics, religion, culture, and politics.

## Racialized people

The term “racialized people” is used in place of the term “visible minority,” which is used by Statistics Canada and the Government of Canada. This definition includes those who self-identify as South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean, Japanese, mixed race, and others who identify as non-White and non-Indigenous.

## Racial equity

Racial equity is defined as the elimination of racial disproportionalities so that race can no longer be used to predict one’s outcomes in life.<sup>83</sup>

Achieving racial equity includes working to address the root causes of these inequities, not just their manifestation. This includes the elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them.

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80. York Region District School Board. (2017). *Equity action plan: A vision for transformation*. Retrieved from <https://yrdsb.civicweb.net/document/86969>.

81. Ibid.

82. Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2013). *Teaching human rights in Ontario—A guide for Ontario schools*. Retrieved from <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/es/node/10772>.

83. Government Alliance on Race and Equity. (n.d.). *Racial equity strategy*. Retrieved from <https://www.racialequityalliance.org/faq/racial-equity-strategy/>.

## Racial literacy

In the context of the education system, racial literacy refers to the capacity of those in the school community to understand the ways in which race and racism work in society. It also involves having the language, skills, and confidence to use that knowledge in teaching practice.<sup>84</sup>

Culturally responsive pedagogy is the byproduct of racial literacy, beginning only with an individual's ability to knowledgeably reflect upon and conceptualize race.<sup>85</sup>

## Racial microaggressions

Racial microaggressions are everyday insults, indignities, and demeaning messages sent to racialized people by well-intentioned people who are unaware of the hidden messages they are sending.<sup>86</sup>

## Racism

Racism is any individual action or institutional practice that treats people differently because of their skin colour or ethnicity. This distinction is often used to justify discrimination.<sup>87</sup>

## Systemic/institutional racism

Racial discrimination can happen at an institutional — or systemic — level as the result of everyday rules and structures that are not consciously intended or designed to discriminate. Patterns of behaviour, policies, or practices that are part of the structures of an organization or an entire sector can disadvantage or fail to reverse the ongoing impact and legacy of the historical disadvantages experienced by racialized persons. This means that even though you did not intend to, your “normal way of doing things” might be having a negative impact on racialized persons.<sup>88</sup>

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84. Guinier, L. (2004). From racial liberalism to racial literacy: Brown v. Board of Education and the interest-divergence dilemma. *Journal of American History*, 91(1), 92-118.

85. Racial Literacy Club. (n.d.). *About racial literacy*. Retrieved from <https://www.racialliteracy.ca/About/>.

86. Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., et al. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4), 271–286. Retrieved from [https://www.cpedv.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/how\\_to\\_be\\_an\\_effective\\_ally-lessons\\_learned\\_microaggressions.pdf](https://www.cpedv.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/how_to_be_an_effective_ally-lessons_learned_microaggressions.pdf).

87. Canadian Race Relations Foundation. (n.d.). *CRRF glossary of terms*. Retrieved from <https://www.crrf-fcrr.ca/en/resources/glossary-a-terms-en-gb-1>.

88. Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2012). *Racial discrimination brochure*. Retrieved from <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/racial-discrimination-brochure>.

### White fragility

White fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves in White people. This includes an outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt and behaviours such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviours, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium by centering the feelings and experiences of White people.<sup>89</sup>

### White privilege

The unquestioned and unearned set of advantages, entitlements, benefits, and choices bestowed upon people solely because they are White. For the most part, White people who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it.<sup>90</sup>

### White supremacy<sup>91</sup>

White supremacy is the ideology that White people and the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of White people are superior to racialized people and their ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions. While most people associate white supremacy with extremist groups like the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazis, white supremacy is ever-present in our institutional and cultural assumptions that assign value, morality, goodness, and humanity to White people while casting people and communities of colour as worthless, immoral, bad, inhuman, and “undeserving.” Drawing from critical race theory, the term “white supremacy” also refers to a political or socioeconomic system where White people enjoy structural advantages and rights that other racial and ethnic groups do not, both at a group and individual level.

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